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HOME TO INDIA

HOME TO INDIA

by

SANTHA RAMA RAU

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TO

MY FAMILY

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CHAPTER ONE

RETURN TO BOMBAY, 1939

THE FIRST words my grandmother said to me when I returned to Bombay after ten years' absence were, "My dear child, where in India will we find a husband tall enough for you?"

"I don't think I need worry about that for some time," I suggested. "After all, I'm only sixteen."

"That's nearly twice as old as I was on my wedding day."

There was clearly no answer to that, and I turned to my mother for help. She was just getting out of her car—the only woman I know who can do it gracefully—and was looking amused but encouraging. She came up the front steps to my grandmother's house to my rescue. Under cover of the greetings and embraces I regained what I like to think was my composure, though my sister assured me that I didn't lose my hunted look all day. As we walked across the deep veranda into the cool twilight of the house, I decided that if this introduction was any sample, India was going to be unusual, at least—if unnerving.

Standing at the top of the white steps, my grandmother had looked imposing, if not positively frightening, but when I stood next to her I saw that she was a tiny woman—something under five feet—with a small, erect figure. Her face has a deceptively submissive expression; on her forehead she wears the heavy red, yellow, and white caste marks of the Saraswat Brahmin; her hair is drawn back to the low knot worn by the conventional Hindu woman. She never wears shoes or sandals unless she is going into the city in the car, and her feet are as flexible and sensitive-looking as her hands. I followed this tidy little woman, in her red cotton sari, wondering just how I should feel towards a virtual stranger who happened to be my grandmother.

In the drawing-room the rest of the family was waiting for us. Grandfather picked up his cane and came across the room. "This is a very real pleasure," he said in his careful Oxford English. "I trust your journey over was not too uncomfortable. Travelling since the beginning of the war has been even more tiring than in normal times, has it not?" (This was in 1939.) He looked bent, and much older than I remembered him, but his

impersonal voice and inquisitive eyes had not changed. "Let me reintroduce you to your relatives. You have indeed been away from India too long." Aunts and uncles and cousins came forward, and we smiled, shook hands, made the usual meaningless comments and greetings. The youngest girl in the house gave us each a cluster of jasmin flowers strung together on red twine.

Mother said quickly to me, "Darling, how lovely they will look tucked in behind your pompadour," to indicate what I was supposed to do with them.

Premila, my elder sister, who has an irrepressible sense of the incongruous, muttered under her breath, "Well, we're over the floor show. When do we eat?"

My mother and Premila and I had arrived in Bombay that morning from South Africa. During my father's three years' diplomatic appointment in South Africa he had not been able to take a vacation to visit Premila and me at school in England, so in the summer of 1939 he told Mother firmly that since he had gone to all the trouble and expense of giving his children the kind of education that has made the cultured classes what with a little trouble they need never have been, he demanded the privilege of seeing what damage was being done. Mother called us from South Africa and told us to take the next boat out. We did—and when the war in Europe broke out, and we could not get passage back to England to finish our education, my mother decided to take us back to see India.

It was when Mother saw a notice outside a cinema in South Africa which read: "Indians, natives and dogs are not allowed," that her patience suddenly evaporated.

"Oh *dear!*" she said. "Why don't we leave this impossible country?"

We bought our reservations to India that day.

My mother is an exciting person to travel with. She always wears a sari and is tremendously fond of brilliant colours. People are apt to come up to her and ask her to pose for portraits or studio photographs—this has happened several times—and often she is asked for her autograph, as strangers seem to be certain that if she isn't advertising something she must be a film star.

Time and again, at parties given by South Africans, I had heard the anti-Indian prejudice of the people explained to Mother with the phrase, "If only the Indians here were like you . . ." Father's

diplomatic position kept her from answering as she would have liked.

She describes herself in a tone of parody as "Junoesque". Her hair has always been knotted in the traditional Indian way simply because she has never found time to think up a new way of doing it. Before she goes out she sometimes looks in her mirror a little desperately, thinking that she really must fuss with cosmetics a bit, as all her friends do, decides that she is late already but will think about it before next time, and with a little gasp of relief hurries off.

As our ship had moved into the Bombay harbour that morning, the ten years that I had been away from India had begun to seem like a formidable barrier to "understanding" India. While we watched the reasonably exotic skyline of Bombay become clearer through the early morning mist, I hoped that the fact that most of the members of Mother's and Father's families were still in India would make our introduction to the country quicker and more complete. But at the same time I felt homesick for London, the long windy evenings, taxi-drivers coughing outside restaurants, and the greyness over the river at three in the afternoon.

Mother said, "I'm sorry your first introduction to India after all this time has to be by smell." The curious smoky and spiced breeze from the bazaars blew across the deck. Gradually we could make out the more impressive buildings—all railway stations or hotels, it turned out.

Customs and passport officials are the same all over the world, and by the time they had guided us through the formalities we were too tired to care what Bombay looked like. Seen from a car window, the Indian bazaar sections of the city were surprisingly like the glamorous Orient of Hollywood movies, with beggars rapping at the car window, half-naked people asleep on the pavements, and fly-infested selling-booths. The English parts of the city, with their expensive shops and stiff uneasy houses, looked familiarly provincial. Only the neat blocks of apartment houses along the sea roads seemed incongruous.

My grandmother's house is in Colaba, the extreme end of the island of Bombay. To her considerable annoyance, since the beginning of the war Colaba had been designated a military reservation, and civilians who happened to be living there could enter and leave it only after their passes had been examined by the guards on duty. By way of protest, my grandmother would refuse to exchange one word with these guards even when they were

Indian. She would always take one of her servants with her when she had to leave Colaba, to take care of the tiresome business of passes. Accordingly we found a servant waiting for us at the barrier to escort us through the military examination.

On both sides of the drive up to the house there were great banks of wet, dark tropical plants and bushes. The hollows were steamy and lined with hibiscus in flower. We drove past the tennis-court, which was covered with green slime, for it had been flooded for the last few months of the monsoon. Now the servants' children were making mud castles on it and climbing the guard wire to steal the mangoes from the trees.

The house itself was large and white. Red and purple bougainvillea streamed down the walls and made a moving screen between the pillars of the porch. Later that morning, when my cousin Asha showed us round the compound, we saw that the garden extended almost as far behind the house. Here were the servants' quarters, low-roofed and mud-walled, with the inevitable brass vessel of water heating on the wood fire in the courtyard. The Brahmin cook was sitting in the shade, wearing only a loin-cloth, twisting his hair on the top of his head and reading his prayer-book. One of the women was crouching by the earthen fireplace blowing the hot embers into flame, while her daughter ground spices in a stone bowl next to her. They all stood up, "Salaam Miss Sahib, salaam *ji*." They stared at us, smiling and inquisitive.

My cousin Asha told them that we greeted them too, that we were her relatives from a distant country, that we couldn't speak Hindustani. The little boys drew circles in the dust with their toes—they clearly didn't believe such absurdities.

We walked back to the house. Inside it was cool and dark. The bamboo matting had been drawn across the verandas. There was the monotonous sound of the fans in every room. Already, now that the formalities of our arrival and the introductions to the family were completed, the members of the household had settled back to their normal routine and their daily occupations. After all, we were members of the family, and if we were excused our duties to that family for one day, the others were not. We were not guests or visitors; we may have been away for a very long time, but now we had returned, restoring normalcy to the family and taking up our neglected positions in it.

Asha led us through the living-room, furnished almost completely in the Indian style with low, hard *thakats*—wooden plat-

forms—covered with a white tapestry or heavy woven cloth and softened only with bolsters piled against the wall. The tables were of intricately carved rosewood—useless for anything but decoration. The only ornaments were the brass vases filled with red flowers (as this was a joyful occasion) and the Benares trays piled high with jasmins. These would be changed twice or three times a day, according to how fast the flowers wilted. In a wall niche was a small image of Durga, the wife of the god Shiva, which the children had decorated during the Dusserah festival with tinsel and pieces of red silk. They were commemorating her victory over a demon with the head of a buffalo, Asha explained. For nine days she would be worshipped, and on the tenth she would be thrown into the water.

"Alone at last," Premila said as Asha closed the door on us in our bedroom. With a sigh she threw herself onto a bed, only to rise instantly announcing furiously that her back was probably broken. We turned up the bedclothes to find that the mattress was just a thin cotton pad, and that underneath, the bed was made of plain wooden boards.

Mother came in with her hair down just as Premila was saying, "What I like about travel is that one can have such good clean fun roughing it in out-of-the-way places."

"What's all the noise about?" Mother asked.

"Look at this bed. For heaven's sake! Am I supposed to sleep on this?"

"You certainly are. And very thankful you'll be, too, in the really hot weather."

"But these are *boards*——"

"Has Asha been showing you round the garden?" Mother interrupted. Her years of diplomatic training have instilled in her the habit of avoiding scenes.

Presently Mother went downstairs to find out what she was expected to do by way of duties about the house. Premila looked pensively at the garden.

"I wonder," she said, "whether one can get a decent tan in this sun."

"We'll ask Them at lunch."

"Working on the assumption that They have lunch."

"Well, They must eat sometime."

"Probably behind locked doors. It's nearly three o'clock already, and They can probably keep this up for hours yet."

She pulled up the shades on the other windows and opened the

French doors. The sun and the heat streamed in, and with them the pigeons. Premila was past speech. We both stood and watched the birds fly unconcernedly in and perch on the rafters, making their curious, persuasive purring. Gradually they made more and more noise until the room sounded like the parrot house at the Zoo.

My grandmother came in to call us for tea, and found us still staring at the pigeons.

"There seem to be pigeons in the room," Premila said patiently.

"Their nest is up there in the rafters."

"You always keep pigeons in your rooms?"

"Only here. They will not build on the ground floor."

"Isn't it sometimes a little inconvenient?"

"Not at all." She added pointedly, "They deserve the shelter as much as we do."

"Yes, of course. I suppose they do."

"Besides," my grandmother said, with a distinct twinkle, "you might have been a pigeon in your last birth."

That apparently settled it.

Tea was served in the dining-room. The room was arranged in the formal English manner, but the meal was relatively casual. Aunts and uncles drifted in and out, apparently unaware of the presence of other people. They picked up cups of tea and hard little varnished sweets or triangular curry-puffs and wandered off again with a polite nod in our direction. By way of conversation I asked if there was any place we could sun-bathe after tea. My grandmother looked astonished and angry.

"Sun-bathe indeed! We're going to have a hard enough time getting you married as it is, since you have acquired your Western tastes, without your ruining your only asset—a fair skin—with a sunburn!"

"Can't get away from colour prejudice even here, can we?" Premila said to me.

Dinner was an entirely different meal. It was served late—about nine o'clock—and, we discovered, was the chief meal of the day. *Chota hasari*—the little breakfast—consists of a cup of tea at five-thirty or six in the morning, with possibly some fruit or toast served with it. At about eleven or at midday a heavier meal is eaten: *chapatis*—thin unleavened wheat cakes—and curry, with *dal*—a kind of lentil soup—and curds and sweets of some sort.

But for dinner, I was to learn, there was always rice, several varieties of curry, pepper-water and *dal*, *chapatis*, curds, buttermilk, pickles of various sorts, cabbage spiced with bay leaves. Afterwards all kinds of sweets were served, some heavily spiced, tasting unfamiliar and strong, and some that seemed to be just sweetened milk. Fruit from the garden and from the bazaars was then brought on—mangoes, guavas, pomegranates, nectarines—they all had exotic, story-book names.

This meal was eaten on the wide veranda opening off the living-room. An enormous cloth was spread on the stone floor. By the light of the oil lamps which were used on the veranda (though the rest of the house had electricity) the silver and the brassware on the "table" looked bright and foreign. The food was placed on flat, round silver *thalis*, like small trays, and the curries and other dishes were contained in little matching bowls clustered round the *thalis*; even the water-glasses were made of silver.

We sat on low wooden stools round the cloth, and ate with our fingers. The technique of this was hard enough to master, particularly with liquids, but we had to remember as well the complicated and formal ritual of the rest of the meal. As the servants bring round fresh dishes, you serve yourself with the left hand. You must always use only your right hand in the actual eating of your food. You must wait until the men have begun their meal before you may begin on your own food. And even then, you must wait till the older women start to eat. This grading system, we were told, was a concession to changing times and relaxing manners and formalities. In the old days, the women would not even sit down to their meal until the men had entirely finished. They would wait in the kitchen and help the servants in serving the food, or in the more well-to-do homes they would wait in their rooms. I noticed that my grandmother still maintained this custom, and although she would sit with us, she would eat nothing until her husband had finished his meal. I think she would have liked to compel all the women in her household to behave in the traditional way, but this was one of the few instances in which she had found that social progress had got out of hand.

The servants scurried about on bare feet, the tails of their turbans and the fullness of their white coats waving behind them as they dodged among the people at the table with fresh dishes. They were silent, obsequious, and omnipresent.

After dinner, when we returned to the living-room, I turned to my grandfather and asked him if one could get some news on the

radio at this time. In the middle of my sentence I stopped abruptly. It had suddenly occurred to me that there might not be a radio in the house, and that I might embarrass them by asking. But my grandfather said, "Do not be uncomfortable; we have a portable wireless here which one of your cousins brought back from England."

He walked over to a table in the corner and unlocked a cabinet fronted with dark glass. Inside was the radio, shiny and anachronistic in this twilit Indian room. It looked as if it had never been used, but the battery seemed still to be good, for as I fiddled with the knobs the precise English voice of the news-caster from All-India Radio, the Government-owned system, broke incongruously into the room saying something about ". . . the impregnable defences of the Maginot Line. . . ." Already Europe and the war seemed like a half-remembered movie.

CHAPTER TWO

ON LEARNING TO BE AN INDIAN

My GRANDMOTHER cannot speak English. I have never discovered whether this is from principle or simply because she has never tried, but she understands it perfectly. In England, Mother had kept Premila and me familiar with Hindustani by speaking it to us sometimes when we were home for vacations, and by teaching us Indian songs. So during our first few weeks in Bombay we could both understand the language, though we were still too out of practice to try speaking it. Consequently my grandmother and I spoke different languages to each other. But we got along very easily in spite of it.

I found after a few days that in her own indirect way she was trying to instil in me something of the traditional Hindu girl's attitude to the household, the rest of the family, and living in general. The servants were the first problem that came up. Whenever the telephone rang, one of the servants would run to answer it. They were unanimously terrified of the instrument, and would hold the receiver well away from the ear and scream "Allo?"

Naturally, unless the caller and the name of the person who was being called were both very familiar to the servant, nothing

was understood or accomplished. After watching this procedure for some time, I began to sprint for the telephone, too, whenever it rang. As long as I won it was all right, but occasionally I would reach it at the same time as the house-boy. The first time this happened he grasped the receiver and ignored my outstretched hand. I asked him please to let me answer the phone in future if I were in the house—this in very polite, if halting, Hindustani. I used the formal form of "you", as I would have to any stranger.

Afterwards my grandmother called me into her room. In her own mysterious way she had overheard the conversation, and wanted now to warn me against treating the servants in such a way again.

"They are not your equals, so do not treat them as such. It is not enough for the servants to be frightened of you; that fear must be founded on respect. This pandering to them is some unreasonable sentimentality you have picked up in the West. It embarrasses them as much as it irritates me. . . ."

She went on to explain that one could retain a feeling of equality (tinged all the same with condescension) for the cook, because he, after all, had to be a Brahmin—one of our own caste—as he handled the food. By all means we should give the servants medicines if they were sick, see that their children were well treated, visit their quarters and make sure that their rooms were kept clean, even give their children an education—which they would never get if it were left to their families—but we should always keep our social distance.

Then there was the matter of prayers in the mornings. My grandmother was always up by five o'clock, and said her prayers, decorated the images in her shrine, and sang the hymns of the day at that time. She would light a little ceremonial fire, throw on it spices and something that smelt like incense; when the fire died she rubbed her fingers in the ash and smeared it on her forehead. This provided the white part of her caste mark for the rest of the day. The other women of the house were expected to join her, though there was no expressed compulsion. After a few days of this I decided that if I expected to be able to stay awake after nine at night I must stop keeping these hours.

One afternoon I told my grandmother that the prayers were meaningless to me except as a curiosity, that I could make no sense of the hymns, which were sung in Sanskrit (I'm pretty certain they were incomprehensible to her also), and that I felt I was too old to be converted to Hinduism now.

She assured me briskly that even if I wanted to, I could not be re-converted to Hinduism, and that no such expectation had prompted her to suggest that I come to prayers with her. I had been born a Hindu, but since I had crossed water, eaten beef, neglected to wear my caste mark, and committed innumerable other offences, I had lost my right to both my religion and my caste.

"But don't assume from that that you may marry anyone outside the Brahmin caste!" The real reason, it turned out, for this religious indoctrination had been to show me something of the values by which Indians live.

"Do you realize that you know nothing of a factor which is vital to the lives of most of your countrymen? Do you always want to see India through the eyes of a visitor? The real Indians are the villagers, the peasants. Poverty and the work on the land are so much a part of their daily living that they must have a tremendous, inclusive faith to make such living possible. If you want to understand these people, you must also understand something of Hinduism. It is the most rigid of beliefs, the most realistic of philosophies, and it determines for them everything, from their food to their morals.

"We have been called pacifists," she continued, showing for the only time that I can remember a consciousness of the existence of contemporary politics, "but it is not ignorance that makes us so. We could be the most highly educated country in the world. We have all the prerequisites for intelligent 'political consciousness' —*if that were an end.* But I, for one, can only hope that the religion and philosophy of our people will secure them against civilization, and what you call 'progress'. Bless you, my child, progress is a convenient term for describing our journey from the great age of India."

If I had at the time been less scared of my grandmother, I would have argued with her about her attitude towards conditions in India, which I thought hopelessly reactionary. Concepts which had always seemed to me self-evident she ignored or nullified with her strange, kindly, patronizing attitude towards "those Indians less fortunate than ourselves". Equality of opportunity? Absurd!

"But I can see that you do not even know what I am talking about. Because we let politics pass us by, because we have evolved no way of writing down our music, because we do not preserve in a concrete form our art and our stories, the West considers that

we have lost our culture. But it is in the oral traditions of the villages that the arts of India are really alive. The brief Western immortality of museums is pointless to people who have seen eternity in their earth. In comparison with this the people of the West are short-sighted, are they not?"

"I suppose so."

"And we are long-sighted—which is not the same as being far-sighted," she added.

I was growing impatient because I had invited a friend to tea, it was dangerously near tea-time, and I had yet to change.

"Is it all right," I asked my grandmother casually, "if I have a friend to tea?" It was a very informal meal, and Asha frequently had girls from her school to it, so I didn't think there would be any objections.

"Perfectly all right, my child, if she is a suitable friend."

"Well, it's a he. I should think he's suitable. He travelled over from South Africa with us. Mother liked him."

I have never seen anyone looked as shocked as my grandmother did then.

"The more I see of you girls the more amazed I am at your mother for the extraordinary education she has given you, and above all for allowing such outrageous behaviour from any girl in our family!"

"I don't think this concerns her at all," I said, surprised. "Because, she could scarcely have kept us in a vacuum during all those years in England—particularly when she was away so much of the time!"

"That is exactly what I told her. You should never have been taken to England. You should have been left here in our care."

" But we wanted——"

"Don't argue with me, my dear child. I will discuss this with your mother."

I turned to leave the room. "Well, shall I call him up and tell him not to come?"

"Of course you cannot do that. If you have invited him already, we are obliged to extend hospitality to him. But while I am the head of this house it will not happen again."

Upstairs I asked Mother what to do. I told her that my grandmother had not yet heard the whole story. I had promised John that I would have dinner with him. Mother looked at me despairingly. "Was it for this that I learned to be a diplomat's wife?"

"I don't see that I've done anything so awful."

"I suppose it never occurred to you that your grandmother never receives Englishmen in her house?"

"Why *would* it occur to me?" I asked.

"For obvious reasons. The situation being what it is in India, in her own inimitable way your grandmother makes a personal—or rather a social—issue of it."

"I thought she was supposed to be so detached from politics."

Then Mother began to think that the whole situation was funny. "But the really appalling thing is your dinner engagement with him! If you go out alone with him, and the family knows about it, you're as good as married to him."

"You mean I'm not supposed to be alone with any man until I decide I want to marry him?"

"I'm afraid that's right, as long as we stay in your grandmother's house."

"But *Mother*, doesn't that seem to you a little absurd?"

"Darling, I was never alone with your father until I was married to him."

"But *Mother*——"

"I know, I know, times are changing, *everybody* does it; but I'm sorry, dear, you'll have to break the dinner appointment."

"But *Mother*——"

"Let's not discuss it further, shall we?"

When John came we had tea in icy solitude on the front veranda. His first remark was, "You look pale. Do you feel all right?"

"I feel fine. I'm not allowed to wear make-up around here." I had had a brief argument with Mother about that, too.

"Never thought it would make so much difference."

"My grandmother doesn't approve of it."

"Damn right. Now you won't get lipstick all over the cups and the napkins."

As Mother came out to join us the curtains to the living-room swung behind her, and I saw that the family was gathered there. I don't know how anything immoral could have gone on with the gardeners as an audience and on an open veranda, but I suppose they just wanted to make sure. I was thankful that John was facing out towards the garden.

He asked Mother where the family, of whom he had heard so much, were.

"Oh, they went out."

"*All* of them?"

"Of course," Mother said, as if it were the most natural thing.

"Oh."

"They went to the tennis tournament." When Mother says something in that carefully explanatory way, as if it were absurd that anyone shouldn't know, nobody can say, "What tournament?"

I took John out into the garden to tell him I couldn't dine with him that evening. I thought it would be best to tell him the whole story. I don't think he had the least idea what it all meant, for he just looked very hunted and said, "But you *don't* want to marry me, do you?"

The incident, when I looked back on it, brought into sharp contrast for me the astonishing changes that have taken place within fifty years in the ordinary girl's life in India. My grandmother was married when she was nine years old. When I heard that, I was profoundly shocked. Child marriage in books was one thing, but such a barbarous thing in my own family was quite another. Apparently I, too, had been influenced by the sensational inaccuracies that have been put out about India in books like Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*.

When my grandmother says that she was married when she was nine, she means that a betrothal ceremony was performed between her and my grandfather. Perhaps "betrothal" indicates too weak a link, for she could not then have married any other man—even if my grandfather were to have died before the actual wedding ceremony. Her "husband's" family would have been obliged to clothe her and shelter her just as they would the widow of one of their sons. As soon as the betrothal was completed she went to live in her mother-in-law's home. She stayed there until her mother-in-law died, and she, as the oldest woman in the house, became the head of the family.

Between the time when she first came to live at the house and the time that the real marriage ceremony took place, about seven years later, she was carefully chaperoned by some member of her "husband's" family on all occasions when she had to appear socially or in the presence of any men. This, Mother assures me, is the traditional method, at least in our caste. She took her place at once in the daily life of the home. A Hindu girl's duties in her mother-in-law's home are specific and exacting. Their purpose

is to train the girl to be, as nearly as possible, the perfect wife and mother.

It is practically a tradition among Hindu women that their mother-in-law is always a monster of efficiency, and demands equal competence from them. She insists that the young bride must give no order to a servant which she cannot perfectly carry out herself. Consequently the bride must learn to cook, sew, clean, bring up children (and there are always several in the house on whom she can practise), run the family life, advise those younger than herself, keep the accounts of the household and keep a careful check on the finances of each individual member of the family. I'm sure every Hindu wife of that generation can tell stories about having had to cook meals for twenty-five people single-handed, or of having had to rip out a seam fifteen times because it was not sewn finely enough.

In those days, half a century ago, the joint-family system still dominated the social life of Hindus. My grandmother's mother-in-law, for instance, presided over her family, with her husband as a sort of consort. All their sons lived in the house with them, and as the boys married brought their wives to live in the family home. Their daughters lived there until they were married, and then they, like my grandmother, went to live in the homes of their mothers-in-law. The children of the sons were educated in the house by tutors until they were old enough to go abroad to college. My grandmother learned to read and write along with her nieces and nephews after she was married, but that was the limit of her education. Besides these close members of the family, various cousins, and great-uncles left over from another generation, lived in the same house. It was a joint family of the most conservative type.

Originally this social unit had grown out of the fact that India was almost entirely an agricultural country, and wealth was measured only in land. The sons of any land-owning family, therefore, were compelled to live together for economic reasons, and because the laws for property division were so sketchy. As the system took root and grew, somehow the women seem to have taken charge. Their province—and this is true to a wide extent even today—was the home, and there they were dictators. The wife of the oldest man in the house held and dispensed all the money in the household. Anything that any member earned was given to her, and she drew from each according to his capacity and gave to each according to his need. So although she had no

legal rights, she could, if she wanted, have absolute control over the members of her own family.

By the time my grandmother, as the wife of the oldest son, came to be head of the household, the system was already breaking down. Our family moved from the south, which is our home, to Bombay. My grandmother found that her sons showed a regrettable tendency to wander off to what she considered the less civilized parts of the world. One of them, Shivan, even married a Viennese girl, beautiful—but a foreigner. Grandmother found that she had no control either over whom her sons married or over the education of her grandchildren. But to look at her and the way in which she lived you would never suspect that the conditions which made her standards valid were vanishing from India.

One of the minor forms which my grandmother's continued autocracy took was the examination of the mail received by anybody living in the house. Asha told me that she used to censor, and sometimes entirely remove, letters from people of whom she did not approve. She did not know the people who wrote to me, and still had not gathered in her own way their respective life histories, so she would just question me closely about all my mail. From whom were the letters? Any of them from men? Where had I met them? Did my mother know their families? If the questions were not satisfactorily answered, she would say, "In my opinion you should not reply to that letter," or, "Surely a brief note will be sufficient answer."

To me even Mother's education—which seemed to her so progressive and enlightened—appeared incredibly narrow. Certainly she was not married at an appallingly early age—although her sisters were; she was given, on her own insistence and on the arguments of one of her brothers who was at an English university, a formal education at school and college. She had wanted to be a doctor, and after endless arguments with her mother she was allowed to go to medical school in Madras. But unfortunately her mother heard that she was the only girl in her class and that every morning she would find notes on her desk from the men students—some expressing their view of women who broke the fine conventions of Indian womanhood by leaving their homes and entering a world of men, and some exclaiming poetically, "If I were Dante, you would be my Beatrice. . . ." She was taken out of the school immediately, and continued, instead, more ladylike work in English literature in a women's college.

All the same, Mother defied two of the most rigid social con-

ventions of the time before she was twenty-six. She earned a living by lecturing in English literature in a Madras college; and at twenty-five she was the first Kashmiri girl to marry outside her community. When we went back to Kashmir—more than twenty years after Mother's marriage—I met women who still would not receive Mother and could scarcely be civil to her if they met her at somebody else's house, because of the shocking way in which she had broken their social rules when she was a girl. For at that time in India there was a prejudice not only against inter-caste marriages, but against inter-community ones too. If your family or your ancestors came from Kashmir, your husband should come from there too.

Because Mother had to fight against the old standards, and because she was brought up to believe in them, she has an emotional understanding of them which my sister and I will never have. Brought up in Europe and educated in preparatory and public schools in England, we felt that the conventions were not only retrogressive and socially crippling to the country, but also a little ridiculous. We thought at the time that one needed the perspective of travel to see these things. But we were only flattering ourselves, for later we found many young Indians who had lived at home all their lives and had a far clearer picture of India's social problems and, moreover, were doing a great deal more towards solving them than we ever thought of doing.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT WEATHER IS TO AN ENGLISHMAN

TOWARDS THE end of our first week in Bombay, Mother and Premila and I were invited to a party given by some friends of ours for the Congress ministers who were resigning from the provincial ministries because Britain had brought India into the war without consulting Indian representations. The events following that initial insult to the plan for progressive if gradual Indian autonomy, had made this action the only effective protest. Even though the party was for retiring ministers, I had expected that there would be some attempt to make it a festive affair, but it proved to have less liveliness than a wake. The Bombay ministers themselves seemed to be absorbed in a depression which

they did not try to alleviate by even the grimmest humour. Now, surely, the British had taken one step too many. Now at last Gandhi would act, and mobilize the country to final and conclusive passive resistance. Surely this was no time to be held back by fine points of ethics. Surely . . . surely . . . surely . . .

Even the host and hostess made no attempt to introduce any other topic of conversation than politics. I sat in a corner of a *thakat* learning the first lesson of social life in India: to the Indian, politics are what the weather is to an Englishman. Politics are an introduction to a stranger on a train, they are the standard filler for embarrassing silences in conversation, they are the inevitable small talk at any social gathering.

People assumed, because of my public-school English accent, that I was pro-British. In a sense I was, because I had been brought up in England, and had adopted, without really thinking about it, the usual unclear English attitude about India. I felt, then, that all these " petty politics " were hopelessly ill-timed, when there was fascism to be fought all over the world. I loved, and thought I understood, the English people, and I felt that in some obscure way they were being attacked. It took me two years to realize that Indians must be capable of fighting fascism in India before India can effectively join the Allies in their fight against totalitarianism in the rest of the world.

That party, which was so unfamiliar then, set a pattern for countless other parties which I was to attend in every part of India under countless different circumstances. The members of the Congress Party, in their white *khaddar*—home-spun—clothes and soft white Gandhi caps, talked in low, depressed voices, speaking familiarly and with nicknames of local politicians, and they always spoke of Nehru and Gandhi, Gandhi and Nehru. As usual, they spoke in a mixture of Hindustani and English. Phrases like "working committee meeting" or "Bombay Presidency" would flash out of rapid, incomprehensible talk. Occasionally an entire sentence would reach me: "Are we saving the world from fascism? Charity begins at home!"

At parties like this no liquor was ever served because it would offend the Moslem guests, and nothing with meat in it was served because the Hindus present might object. There were only the anæmic-looking English sandwiches, and cakes from the French *pâtisserie*, and the heavy milk sweets covered with silver leaf, highly spiced savoury rolls—*puccoras*—curry puffs, which were brought in from the kitchen in relays still too hot to

touch. I was too bored and nervous at this first reception to take an intelligent interest in what was going on around me.

Eventually, when I managed to drag Mother away from the friends whom she had not seen for so many years, I asked her if she would mind stopping in for half an hour at the Yacht Club, where I had promised to meet John for a drink to make up for my rudeness a few nights before. Mother looked at me very strangely.

"Oh, of course," she said at last, "I had forgotten. *He's* a stranger here as well, isn't he?"

"Yes. Why?"

Mother smiled. "I hate to break it to you like this, but no Indians are allowed in the Yacht Club. Exclusively for Europeans."

"What a grisly sort of place!"

"It runs true to form. The colonels congregate, call each other 'old boy', and order chota pegs."

"John is going to be embarrassed out of his wits," I remarked.

"Poor sweet! You'd think, wouldn't you, that it would strike *some* of them as a little absurd?"

We drove up to the Yacht Club. John was waiting for us outside.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Mother said, "if social insults were to break up the Empire long before political injustice could."

John leaped into the car almost before it had stopped. His scrubbed, schoolboy's face had a high gloss of embarrassment on it.

"Look, I thought it would be ever so much more fun to join some friends of mine at the Harbour Bar at the Taj Mahal Hotel. You don't mind, do you?"

"Can't think of anything nicer."

Mother left us at the Harbour Bar. The friends there proved to be delightful—far pleasanter, certainly, than the Yacht Club crowd could have been. But although the evening was a success, John—with what he considered perfect finesse—wriggled out of a tentative plan we had made to go to the Elephanta Caves together.

The first person I saw in the group we joined at the Taj was an English journalist, Andy Miller, whom I had known in France. His tow-headed untidiness and high voice with its slight stammer had not changed at all. Andy, it seemed, had come to India because it promised to be an exciting assignment, even though it meant working for one of the most conservative papers. He was prepared to spend several months, in his own words, "chatting

to A.D.C.'s over tea" so that he could be in India when the revolutionary events really began to take place. Meanwhile he was "bootlicking for the mighty" and keeping on the good side of the British officials in India "because that's the only way you can get the information you want".

"And I for one," he concluded, "am not even sure that India *is* a country in the sense with which we are familiar, is it?"

If I had not just come from the party for the Congress ministers I don't suppose I would have been as impatient as I was with his confused liberalism. In Europe it had seemed the only intelligent way of thinking; in India it seemed singularly ineffective. When Andy talked about democracy, or used phrases about "the things we are fighting for", I found, to my surprise, that I was tempted to adopt the typically defensive attitude of the Indian, and ask just what he thought we *were* fighting for. To an Indian words like "equality", "democracy", or "autonomy" from an Englishman sound ironically hypocritical.

When we came out of the Taj, I saw my grandmother's car parked outside the hotel. It is sedate and black. The ayah, a household servant, came out of it, salaamed to us, and explained that my grandmother wished me to come home in her car. It would not be necessary for the sahib to accompany me.

John was looking apprehensive, and when I told him that I had completely forgotten I had to call for my grandmother at a friend's house and go to dinner with her and some relatives who lived at the other side of the island, he did not even look surprised. He accepted the feeble excuse, said "good-bye" and ran quickly towards his own car. He never asked me for another date, although we met occasionally at parties. Apparently Anglo-Indian relations in India were too much for him.

My grandmother must have known that I would arrive at the house cross and resentful, for she met me on the porch.

"A special treat for you tonight," she said, and smiled as if she knew that I realized what she was doing. "We are having meat curry for dinner."

I was surprised out of my exasperation because I knew that my grandparents were such strict vegetarians they would not even eat eggs. Some Hindus draw a careful distinction between fertilized and unfertilized eggs, but my grandmother ignored the facts of life and exiled them all. Besides, according to the correct Hindu conventions, even the presence of meat or fish in the same kitchen in which the rest of the food was cooked defiled that food.

"It was cooked outside in the courtyard," she explained. "The gardener's wife, who is not a Brahmin, consented to prepare it for you and Premila. Of course it will be served to you separately at a different table, perhaps—or you could even eat it before dinner. Are we not accommodating?"

I found another surprise upstairs in Mother's bedroom—a box of Craven A cigarettes on the bedside table. My grandmother does not approve of women who smoke. She had made this perfectly clear to all of us when we first arrived. Consequently Mother and Premila used to disappear up to their room after every meal and smoke their cigarettes rather guiltily in solitude.

Now, apparently, the prejudices were forgotten, and my grandmother not only allowed them to smoke, but provided them with cigarettes. We never discovered what the prevalent attitude about cigarettes was, for my grandmother, who treats such matters in the same way she does the presence of the British in India—with the conviction that if she completely ignores them they will eventually go away—never would discuss the subject. Mother's theory was that one of the servants had been given to understand —without any specific orders—that guests in the house, even if they were members of the family, were to be supplied with everything they desired, within reason. Hospitality demanded it.

"I understand you met one of your friends from France today," said my grandfather to me that night at dinner.

"Yes, it was exciting to meet Andy after so long. He was very concerned about Indian politics. I wonder if you can——"

"Ah, France," my grandfather interrupted, and I remembered that one does not talk politics at dinner. "I used to be most interested in the French philosophers at one time. Was it not Descartes who argued thus"—he picked up a sweet from his *thali*—"How can I know whether this is a *mithai* or wax? It looks similar. It feels similar. 'All right,' you say, 'taste it.' Very well . . ." he took a bite out of the sweet. "Certainly it tastes like a *mithai*. But," he smiled triumphantly, the lamplight reflected on his forehead, "but can I *trust* my taste?"

That evening I decided to draw my grandmother out on politics. I asked her Andy's question—whether India could be regarded as a country.

" 'Is India a country in the sense with which we are familiar?' " she repeated. "Well, your English friends would tell you that it is only so in the sense that all Indians walk the same earth and watch the same stars."

She continued thoughtfully, "Your mother tells me that you are not staying with us long, that you will travel over India very far."

"Yes, I think we're leaving for Delhi fairly soon to visit Shivan and Kitty."

"Wherever you go people will tell you about the differences and confusions of India—our disunity and our divergence. But don't forget that we have humanity in common, and we need ask no further than that. We are all people, and among people unity is possible."

I looked at her solemnly, eager to *understand* India. Perhaps I seemed a little ridiculous to her, for she said, "You young people are always romantic and scornful and somehow cynical. You are never realistic. When you travel across this country, keep it in your mind that Indians eat and sleep and work like other people. Indians, too, are selfish and generous and, at times, inspired." She twinkled at me, and the crow's feet round her shiny black eyes contracted with amusement. "And try to remember that the world does not rotate about a point on its circumference."

I left my grandmother feeling a great affection for her as a person. Although I was antagonistic to her way of life, I had a real desire to find out what kind of a country and culture produced such diverse standards as Grandmother's, Mother's and mine. At that time it was still the curiosity of a tourist that made me want to see the country and the life of people my own age.

I was to discover later how much I had to learn about political parties and platforms. Much of the little knowledge I possessed was wrong; the misconceptions which I had acquired without quite knowing where they came from had to be put right. I learned, for instance, that the Congress Party included in its membership people of all religions, not just the Hindus, as I had heard. The Moslem League, on the other hand, did not represent all the Moslems, but only a few thousand of them. In those days out friends with Nationalist sympathies did not consider the Moslem League anything more than a convenient platform for a reactionary minority of Indians. They felt that it showed a political, not a religious, clash of opinion, and that while it was as yet no serious menace to Indian independence, it was conceived in an effort to confuse the issue and provide the British with grounds for maintaining their hold on India until there should be

complete agreement between the Indian political parties. Even at that time we were hearing rumours in Bombay that an "inter-communal" riot could be bought for a couple of hundred rupees —all to prove the British argument that Indians were not yet ready for independence.

This was very different from the picture I had somehow picked up of the political turmoil in India. Nationalists insisted that there was unity in the country and that the real facts had been exaggerated and distorted. In any democracy, they pointed out, there is an inevitable minority which must be allowed to disagree with the Government. They told me that I, like too many strangers to India, had been taken in by propaganda which made the whole problem seem too complicated for the average person to grasp. The principles of the situation in India were very simple. If this was a war to fight imperialism, it should be fought all over the world. In the present state of affairs four hundred million people were being incapacitated as fighting allies because they were not being allowed to participate as free people.

I wanted explanations also for other problems and conflicts which, I was now beginning to think, had been played up to me as a foreigner while I was abroad. What about caste? My grandmother made a great point of our being Brahmins, and while I secretly enjoyed a slightly superior feeling, I told myself sternly that the principle was vicious. Once I put the question to Mother, who explained that the barriers of caste, which had had a purpose and a meaning in one period of India's social development, were now obsolete and were disintegrating rapidly, no matter what my grandmother liked to believe.

"As industrialism here gets under way," Mother said, "more and more Indians will move into the cities. And in apartment houses and restaurants you can't be choosy about who lives next to you or with whom you eat; *if*," she added, "we are allowed to get our industries under way."

"What about the untouchables?" I wanted to know.

"That was originally a barrier against disease. The poorer classes of Indian society thousands of years ago were, as they are today, more susceptible to disease than those in the higher economic brackets; so the villagers took the only steps they knew to protect themselves. These people were made to use different wells from the rest of the peasants. Today we are working very hard to change all that, both to check disease and to remove the

social prejudice. You should know that Gandhiji"—the ending signifies affectionate respect—"has taken up their cause and has re-named them the 'Harijans', or the Chosen of God."

I felt that I had to scrap all my preconceived ideas and start collecting a new set. "I always thought of India as full of so many religions and races and languages that there was bound to be confusion."

Mother replied, "People's religion is their own business, and I think they would, given a chance, have only a friendly interest in other creeds. Nobody can be *converted* to Hinduism. You are either born a Hindu or you're not, and that's all there is to it, so there is no reason in the world why we should fight religious battles; we have nothing to gain by it. As for languages, I have found that one can travel over most of India speaking Hindustani and be understood. It is true that in the far south they talk Tamil. But there are countries in Europe much smaller than India whose populations are forced to be bi-lingual and even tri-lingual, and no one feels that their unity is seriously jeopardized."

If an admission of ignorance is the way to learning, my political education was starting.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITH SHIVAN AND KITTY IN NEW DELHI

THE TRAIN moved slowly into Old Delhi. We had left behind the advertisements for Player's cigarettes and Chrysler cars, which looked so strange with their Hindi captions. We had passed the dingy washing hanging in slum yards, the solitary men staring out of windows. Now we drew into the outdated and gracious but dirty station. The coolies woke from their inter-train naps and fussed their way down to the train, winding their turbans as they ran shouting for attention.

We were to stay with my uncle and aunt, Shivan and Kitty, in their house in New Delhi. Ever since Mother had explained the plan to Premila and me, we had felt a little uncomfortable. We were going to spend the whole winter in Delhi, and it seemed suspiciously like sponging on our relatives, but Mother told us that it was considered very poor form to stay at a hotel when members of the family lived in the same city. It would give

strangers the impression that our family was feuding. Accordingly we searched the platform from our carriage window trying to catch a glimpse of Kitty and Shivan, for they did not follow my grandmother's custom of sending a servant to find the arriving guests.

When Mother and Premila and I climbed down from the train we found that apparently only Kitty had come to meet us. She wore a pale silk sari and was peering doubtfully into the carriages. In the painful glare of the station lights she looked incredibly pretty and gentle. I had not seen her for several years—since the time when she and Shivan used to pay brief visits to London and take Premila and me for ecstatic afternoons at what we used to call the "Sixpenny Bazaar"—Woolworth's. Kitty would give us each ten shillings to buy all the perfume bottles shaped like begging dogs, jig-saw puzzles with guaranteed inter-locking pieces, and yo-yos that we could carry. Shivan was our favourite uncle, partly because we knew him so much better than the others, and partly because he always seemed to be in some sort of scrape with the rest of the family, and would tell us about it in a rather guilty and completely charming way. He wasn't exactly the black sheep : he was the "unconventional one".

Kitty saw us surrounded by coolies each shouting his particular claim to our luggage. She came to us smiling and joining her hands in the Indian greeting. She kissed us all composedly and ordered the coolies away.

"Shivan," she explained, "is making his usual tour of the bookstands to see if they have his book."

"His book?" Mother questioned carefully.

"Oh yes, about industrial labour and such. If they have it he says, 'Good.' If they haven't, he says, 'What!' and looks shocked."

Shivan came up looking worried but obliging, followed by his bearer and a procession of coolies. His appearance is anything but that of the conventional black sheep of the family. He has a kind, vague smile, horn-rimmed bi-focals and thinning hair; somehow he looks like an unsuccessful scientist. He always wears the traditional Indian dress—a long Russian-collared tunic over white cotton jodhpurs crushed into wrinkles around the ankles, and open Indian sandals—even though two of his brothers and many of his friends have adopted the more easily obtained Western costume.

Men's clothes in India change relatively little from province to province. The women's sari is worn in a number of different

ways; basically the plan is similar, but the details of the drapery vary according to the part of India from which the women come. The Maharatta women, for instance, wear their saris draped between their legs, because in the more warlike days of Maharatta history the women used to ride to battle with their men, and needed to be able to sit astride their horses. But the men all over India wear, as their informal dress, a cotton loin-cloth with a long shirt over it; sandals for their feet and a Gandhi cap—rather like a soldier's overseas cap—at all times, indoors or out. The Gandhi cap has replaced the more unwieldy turban very widely in the cities. Now for the most part only the very rich, Maharajas and their entourages, and the very poor, peasants who have to carry things on their heads, and railway porters wear turbans. Depending upon the wearer's circumstances, turbans are of cloth and gold and brocades covered with jewellery, or of cotton; the latter seem always to be in the process of being rewound.

Shivan was wearing the formal dress for Indian men. The formal shoes that should go with that dress are long peaked sandals that look like gondolas with a curling tail in front. Sometimes the uppers of these shoes are embroidered with gold thread or different-coloured leathers, but most people nowadays wear open sandals instead. The formal clothes of the princes are, of course, more elaborate, but the added decoration is not in actual design, but more usually in the substitution of real jewels for buttons, or gold-embroidered collars to the coats, and jodhpurs made of silk or satin.

My uncle's coat was made of thin grey Kashmir wool. One button was undone, and his hair was beginning to stand on end. He looked quite charming.

He greeted us as though he had left us only a few minutes before. He showed no surprise and only a polite interest.

"Kitty and I have just been to the wedding. Really very exhausting. How lucky you were to miss it!"

"What wedding?" I asked. Shivan had the curious habit of assuming that everyone knew exactly what he was talking about with no explanations on his part.

"One of the Viceroy's daughters. Didn't you know? She married one of the A.D.C.'s. So all of us poor innocuous citizens are ordered to mingle with the empire-builders all afternoon at some kind of reception. We grasped iced-coffee in one hand and the local caterer's bun in the other and smiled at each other for

hours. Facial fatigue is what I'm suffering from, it's practically——"

"That's easily remedied," Premila interrupted briskly. "Just give me a raw egg and a jar of cold cream . . ."

"Well," said Shivan, "at least there are only two more to go."

"Two more what?" I was getting confused again.

"Viceregal daughters. The suspense is something shocking."

Kitty was looking desperate. "We really must go home," she said. "Shivan is quite capable of standing here talking about nothing all night."

We drove through the bright and noisy bazaars in Old Delhi, where it was necessary for the chauffeur to sound the horn almost constantly. The car crept along while beggars peered inquisitively in the windows, push-carts were rushed to the side of the road to make room for the car, and Shivan talked happily about the Indian newspaperman's life. Eventually we reached the dark, empty street leading to New Delhi.

A few miles later we found ourselves in a strange geometrical world—New Delhi. A flashily gauche city of straight streets and carefully trimmed grass circles at every cross roads. All the houses there must be painted white, with white or brick walls separating the gardens from the streets. The centre of the town is an enormous circular plaza, from which confusingly similar residential roads radiate. We drove through this maze of red and white, through the shade of trees planted at regular intervals on each side of the road. Soon we passed the monstrous wedding-cake of an Assembly building with its statues of former viceroys. There seemed to be no cars on the roads and no pedestrians on the sidewalks. It was a frighteningly lifeless place.

Shivan looked at the moonlit gardens and silent houses belonging to the hundreds of diplomats and Government workers who compose so large a part of Delhi's population.

"You know," he commented at last, "they say that the only sound to be heard in Delhi at night is the grinding of axes."

Kitty and Shivan's house was low and white, with deep verandas, a rose garden in front and a tennis-court and mango trees behind. The servants were lined up on the front veranda when we arrived. They bowed quickly, looking embarrassed and interested, and vanished before we could say a word to any of them. They were just curious about the "strangers", Kitty assured us. As we walked in I saw a crowd of small children

peering round the corner of the house. They giggled and ran back to the servants' quarters when I turned.

Inside, the house was furnished in a surprisingly successful mixture of Indian and Western styles. Kitty had chosen only Indian materials for her slip-covers, curtains and bedspreads, but the furniture itself was European. The draperies were of heavy *khadi* cotton with borders of unfamiliar stylized animals marching in a solemn procession, and the Kashmiri carpets of winter had just replaced the rope *daris*—made in the Indian jails —which covered the marble floors in summer.

It was late and we were all tired, so we went in to dinner at once. On the centre of the table was a simple but imaginative reproduction of a train made in sugar icing. From the funnel on the engine came a streamer of spun brown sugar—the smoke. The curtain across the door leading to the kitchen bulged suspiciously. The cook was obviously waiting for our admiring gasps. Kitty put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing.

"He gets rather carried away by his work sometimes, I'm afraid," she said in English.

Premila was staring at it in fascinated horror. Mother, as usual, took everything in her stride. She called the cook, congratulated him on his ingenuity as well as on his astonishing mechanical knowledge, asked him to remove it very carefully so that he could display it to the servants' children in the morning, and sat down to her soup.

Kitty's meal, like her house, was a mixture of East and West. After the soup a typically Indian curry was served with rice, *chapatis*, *dal*, and all the accessories to which we had grown accustomed in my grandmother's house. But it was served on plates and eaten with knives and forks. The dessert was the cook's invention. Inspired by the character of the rest of the house, he had blended both the cooking styles he had learned during his experience with English and Indian families. He produced something that tasted like a very rich and very popular Indian sweet —*halva*—yet was made like a soufflé. He wouldn't tell even Kitty how this miracle was accomplished.

In incongruous contrast to the Indian silver and enamel on the table, the carved Indian chairs and Indian ornaments, was the large, shiny Kelvinator refrigerator in one corner of the room. Kitty saw me staring at it several times during the meal.

"I know it looks funny here," she said at last, "but we had to take it out of the kitchen because the servants were so fascinated

with the idea of a machine that could make ice in an hour or so that there was never any left for our drinks. Sometimes the children would put their clothes in the refrigerator during the summer heat. They found that this cooled them off wonderfully for a little while."

I had always thought of Shivan in the way one remembers people one has known only for the summer—irresponsible, living always in the sun and surrounded by a distant glamour. In our spasmodic glimpses of him in Europe he seemed to be perpetually involved in improbable schemes. We met him once in a theosophical camp in Holland. "I'm living in—ah—Aerda Castle," he explained, "for a few weeks anyway. No . . . no, I have no immediate plans." Then he added with a happy smile, "We wash our own dishes." To my seven-year-old imagination this seemed like a wonderful way to live; splendour and squalor all mixed up together.

My grandmother likes to think that he has "settled down" now that he is established as a journalist. She can tell her friends that he works on the staff of the *Hindu*—a prominent Indian paper—and corresponds for several American and British papers. She never says a word about his extensive political activity, or about his work for the Indian trades union movement.

When Shivan announced his engagement to Kitty, no member of the family had courage enough to tell my grandmother about it. Before her sons went abroad to college she had made perfectly clear to each of them her attitude towards foreigners. They hesitated to find out about her attitude towards foreigners in the family.

Kitty was Viennese. But worse than that, Kitty, whose major interest was child psychology, had started an experimental kindergarten school in Benares: she worked for a living. The family was so amazed at the prospect of one of its members marrying such an unusual person that my oldest uncle is reported to have said to Kitty, "Either you misunderstood Shivan, or else you proposed to him." Kitty telegraphed Shivan frantically to reassure herself.

My grandmother's attitude on this occasion was wholly unexpected. Since she could do nothing to alter the fact that Shivan was going to marry a foreigner, she decided to re-model the foreigner as well as she could. Kitty found herself learning Hindustani—she now speaks it fluently. Her European clothes

mysteriously disappeared when she was staying with my grandmother in Colaba, and in their place she found new saris and "family" saris (ones that have belonged to other members of the family) which are the traditional equipment of an Indian bride. Indian jewellery and sandals appeared in the same way, and all her Western cosmetics were replaced by Indian ones: henna for her fingernails, *ghaza* as rouge, sandalwood oil for her skin, attar of roses as perfume, the *kajal*, a black paste that smells of herbs and is used as mascara. The only item that was omitted was *tika* for the caste-mark, which my grandmother felt that Kitty should never wear.

All Hindu women wear in the centre of their forehead a coloured mark which, in the old days, denoted their caste and sub-caste. Nowadays the wearing of the *tika*, a tiny circle of red powder, is a formality, a decoration rather than a badge having particular meaning. The *tika* is made from a mixture of powders and spices; I remember, as a child, opening Mother's little silver box of the powder and sniffing its unfamiliar heavy perfume. Some Indian women find a red paste *tika* more suited to an active life, for it does not blow off as easily, but Mother still puts a small smear of cocoanut oil on her forehead every morning and presses the powder *tika* on to it with her finger, making the circle without the help of the nailhead Premila and I have to use. Nowadays the traditional red *tika* is often replaced by one to match the sari—it may be black, orange or even a piece of gold or silver tinsel. But my grandmother, preserving the old ways even in a matter as small as this, wears the entire complicated *tika* which was meaningful in her childhood. Hers is a long smear of red running across her forehead, a pear-shaped splotch of saffron between her eyebrows, and above that the dab of ash from the shrine fire. Altogether these denote that she is a Saraswat Brahmin—that is, her religion is Hindu, her caste within that religion is Brahmin, and her branch of that caste is Saraswat.

Under my grandmother's guidance, Kitty *became* Indian; my grandmother forgot that she had ever been anything else. She still points out to her friends the astonishing fairness of Kitty's skin and how unusual it is in "this new sports-loving generation" of Indian girls.

Kitty allowed herself to be moulded with admirable grace, and now, like all the other members of the family who do not live in the family home, she keeps up a pretence of conforming to the old rules in my grandmother's presence. She wears no lipstick at

Colaba, keeps her sari over her head whenever she is in the presence of her elders, and addresses only those who are younger than she is, unless she is spoken to.

Her life in Delhi, however, is far from that of the conventional Hindu woman. She and Shivan are not only informed and interested observers of current political and social events in India, but feel themselves inextricably involved in those events. To Shivan every political setback is like a sickness in the family. He worries about countless things—say, the failure of an interview between a Congress Party leader and the Viceroy. He will see people, spend hours on the telephone following every step in the proceedings, he will interview the leaders of all the parties to assess their reactions. He neglects his own writing and seldom shows up at meals. Often he will call Kitty at ten-thirty or so at night saying, "I thought I had better let you know in time that I won't be in to dinner tonight." She never has the heart to tell him that it no longer occurs to her to wait meals for him.

On our first morning in their house Shivan got up as usual about six and spent a couple of hours dictating to his secretary. He expected to be out of the house the rest of the day, and had to finish his work for the *Hindu* before he left. Premila and I came in to breakfast just as he was finishing.

At sight of us he threw up his hands. "Go away!" he said. "I'm eating Quaker Oats!"

Premila looked first amazed, then understanding, then began to laugh. "Don't worry," she said. "We are older now, and I hope more controlled."

Shivan was thinking of the time when neither Premila nor I could eat Quaker Oats because they reminded us too strongly of the car trip from Delhi to Simla. Inevitably we would both be car-sick, and after long experience Mother used to take along dozens of empty Quaker Oats cans so that the journey would not be delayed indefinitely.

All three of us began at once on a flood of reminiscence, which might well have gone on all day if Kitty had not come in and reminded Shivan of his appointments. When he had gone she smiled at Premila and me with a characteristic tilt of her head.

"And what are you two planning to do with your time from now on?"

"Well," said Premila, "I am going to begin job-hunting, and I am going to start as soon as I can talk you into giving me some names and introductions and things."

"I see that you have already learned that everything in India is done through friends of friends," Kitty said. "I dare say that Shivan's secretary would be of as much help as I could be. We'll consult him after breakfast." She turned to me. "Would you be interested in visiting a village school with me?"

"Of course, I'd love to. I'm not very sure what it is."

"I'll tell you about it on the way there. We should be leaving fairly soon, and we'll probably spend the day. It's out in Okhla."

I wondered how and when Kitty did her housekeeping. She couldn't have as large a staff of servants as my grandmother, yet she seemed not to give the house a second thought. I was about to ask her about it when the cook came into the dining-room, followed by four other servants. Kitty did not even turn round, but went on buttering her toast while she called off the menus for the day, specifying the maximum price the cook was to pay for fruit and vegetables. The bearer was told what special jobs were to be done in the house—the marble had to be polished and the verandas watered; the gardener was instructed what flowers he was to cut and how often they were to be changed; the chauffeur was informed that he could have the day off, and the *dhobi* was taken to task about some torn sheets from last week's laundry.

Kitty's housekeeping had taken her exactly twenty minutes. When she looked up she saw that I had been watching her.

"It's a fascinating procedure, isn't it?" she asked. "But you've only seen the first instalment. Now the servants will go back and tell their apprentices what to do." I must have looked puzzled. "For instance, the cook has taken on a pupil who pays him perhaps a rupee or two a month [about 50 cents] to learn his trade from him. This boy does all the marketing, peels the potatoes, shells the peas and so forth. Meanwhile I pay the cook about 20 rupees a month and keep my eyes closed to all these backdoor transactions, on the assumption that as long as the meals arrive on time the rest of it is none of my business."

"And all the other servants do the same thing?" I asked.

"I suppose so." She pushed her chair back from the table. "Come?" she said with her singing Viennese inflection.

Premila and Shivan's secretary went into a conference as Kitty and I walked out of the house. We met Mother at the front door.

"Good morning, darlings," she called. "I'm off to do my errands."

"What errands?"

"Oh . . ." Mother's voice trailed off, "I have to look up old friends and sign my name in the Viceroy's Book . . ." Then she hurried off.

"What book?" I asked Kitty.

Kitty laughed. "You have to leave your name at Viceregal Lodge when you first arrive in New Delhi if you are anything even remotely diplomatic. I think they have to be sure to invite all the appropriate people to the receptions there, and this is the only way they can keep track of their comings and goings."

CHAPTER FIVE

RASHID'S SCHOOL AT OKHLA

KITTY AND I drove away from Delhi along the straight, flat Agra road. It was hot, with all the stale, accumulated heat of summer concentrated in that autumn day. Behind us the dust rolled upwards in thick red clouds. Kitty kept her hand casually and frequently on the horn while we wound our way through the morning traffic. We passed the long lines of bullock-carts, with their unoiled axles screaming—a device which is deliberately intended to keep the bullocks awake, but which seems to have no effect on the drivers, who sleep calmly on top of their loads. The camel-trains were more orderly. Their drivers had threaded ropes through the noses of the animals to facilitate their control, yet it still took the train about a quarter of an hour to swing away from the centre of the road and allow us to pass. The camel-owners were more prosperous than the bullock-owners; the household utensils on the last animal were made of silver instead of brass.

"Merchants," Kitty guessed, "on their way back to Agra."

Okhla, when we reached it, proved to be a scatter of huts with earthen walls plastered with cow-dung, which kept the interiors cool during the day and was used as fuel when it had dried. There was an absurdly tiny shop whose proprietor was a member of the village *panchayat*—the five men who are traditionally elected as governors of the village. He acted as the village bank as well as the village letter-writer. Like all Indian villages, Okhla was deserted at that time in the morning. Most of the people were working in the fields, and the women had gathered at the well, which was their meeting-place and centre of gossip. As we turned

up the dry earth track towards the school, the women stood with their terra-cotta urns on their heads watching us.

Kitty stopped the car. "Is Rashidji up at the school?" she called.

After they had answered us we had to stay and talk to them, for there were countless things they wanted to know about me, a stranger. Where did I live? Who were my parents? Was I married? No? They told me comfortingly not to worry. I still looked young, even if I was nearly seventeen; but it certainly wasn't too early to start looking if I didn't want to bring shame on my unfortunate mother. Why was I here? How long would I stay?

Rashid came out to meet us in front of the school. He was a small man, deceptively frail-looking for one of his immense energy. He made himself understood as much by the gestures of his hands as by his fluent English.

"I am so glad you could come," he said, enunciating each syllable clearly. "We, of course, have been at work since half-past five. We like to begin early in the cool of the day so that we can let the children rest through the hot hours. . . ." He led us across the yard, on three sides of which were the earthen school buildings. Turning to me, he explained, "You must think this is all very primitive, but to us"—in a suddenly florid tone—"it is the realization of a dream. Sometimes I go into Delhi to have dinner with Kittyji, or see some other friends, and everywhere I hear people talking about this 'political consciousness' we must bring to the inarticulate millions of India. And I say to them this is not a present we can give the villagers; we cannot say, 'Come, it is Christmas, here is a gift,' we can only help them. Perhaps we can even give an impetus—but the achievement? That lies with them." He looked at me, trying to gauge my reaction. "But I'm afraid I am only a voice crying in—er—an Indian village."

As we reached the main school building I saw that all the doorways were decorated with enormous yellow sunflowers painted, I was told, by the children.

"They make the colours themselves," Rashid said, "because of course we can't afford to buy them. Nevertheless, even in a matter as small as this, the earth looks after her own." This started him off on a new speech. He told me something of the history of the school, which in a small way was the history of the whole educational movement which the Congress Party had inaugurated through the medium of the village schools.

To begin with, the villagers were suspicious. It was hard, Rashid said, to persuade them that they were really getting something for nothing. And even when that was accomplished, they were not at all sure that they wanted their children to leave their homes. The adult villagers had found in their own lives no use for education, or indeed for literacy. A few of them spoke of a previous adult literacy campaign into which they had been drawn. They remembered that it had taken the quicker ones a short enough time to learn to read and write—and an equally short time to forget all they had learned. They were frankly sceptical.

As soon as the children of the village were old enough to work in the fields they became economically important to their families. Against that argument education carried very little weight. Rashid assured them that the children would learn really useful things in school—how to enrich the soil, how to make the land more productive. Still the parents were not convinced.

"Finally," he said, "I told them that if they would send their children to my school I would provide the means for them to reel cotton for an hour every day. At last the villagers saw some concrete good in education. The spools of cotton can be sold for a few pice each—less than a penny, but enough to make a substantial difference to the family finances. I won my point; they helped build the schoolhouse, and the children come here every day until they are old enough to help their parents in the fields."

We reached a group of children in a corner of the yard who were building a relief map. Some were soaking mehendi leaves to make a red dye to colour the countries.

"It is astonishing," said Kitty, "how they can accept the idea of world geography when they have never been farther than twenty miles from their villages."

Rashid looked round the class with affection and triumph. "It was much easier to get the villagers to consent to co-education than it would have been to get the consent of townspeople. I hope industrialism doesn't draw our people into the cities too soon. They lose that independence of spirit that only ownership and the land can give."

Late that afternoon, when we were leaving Okhla, Kitty asked Rashid to come into Delhi and have dinner at her house. "Or do you have your mothers' class tonight?" she remembered suddenly.

"No," he answered, "that isn't until tomorrow. I would like very much to dine with you."

"Do tell my niece about your success with the ladies, Rashidji," Kitty suggested.

Rashid looked at me pinkly. "I'm afraid your aunt rather misrepresents the incident. Some of my pupils, you see, after they had been coming to school for some months must have carried home favourable reports to their parents. Indeed, their mothers were so impressed that one day several of the men of the village came to me to ask whether their wives could learn as well. Of course I was delighted with the success of the school." He looked at Kitty. "But there was a serious drawback. Most of these women were Moslems, and consequently could meet no men except their husbands. Imagine what a dilemma! I could not let the opportunity pass, yet I could not teach the women. Eventually I reached a solution that pleased all parties. Now, two evenings a week the women gather in the largest room of the school while I lecture to them from behind a screen with my eyes covered."

After some further discussion between Kitty and Rashid about extending the village school system to other communities around Delhi, Kitty and I left. But that evening at dinner talk of the school was resumed. Rashid, true to his promise, had come in on the rickety bus that passes through Okhla twice a day and Mother was much interested in what I had to tell of the visit to Okhla.

"It must have needed a great deal of courage to carry through a scheme like that," she said, turning to Rashid.

"Not courage so much as hard work and money," he replied. "The officials don't really interfere in matters like this. You see, theoretically they are on the side of education for all people."

"I believe," Kitty put in, "that there are even some laws to that effect—for all the good they do."

"But actually they might as well forbid people to go to school. The damage would be about the same, because naturally we cannot afford public schools on any national scale unless they are subsidized by the Government. As long as we don't ask for financial aid we are left undisturbed." Rashid smiled timidly, as though he were expecting to be contradicted.

"I didn't mean that kind of courage," Mother said. "I mean the courage it would need to build a world. I know if I had the job on my hands I wouldn't have the least idea what to put into it." She hesitated. "These children are never going to forget what you tell them now. It must be an almost frightening responsibility. Can you say to the Moslems, 'It is wrong to marry

twice'? Or to the Hindus, 'It isn't sinful to eat beef'?" She looked across the table at Premila and me, and added, "In the West they get out of it easily. They teach their children rigidly, and then say, 'Rely on your conscience; it will tell you good from bad.' My daughters hate generalizations like this, but I have always thought that Indians are rather rational people, and for us, I find, reason and conscience are mutual correctives." She smiled disarmingly. "Am I wrong, Rashidji?"

CHAPTER SIX

A PLACID LIFE SPIKED WITH ROMANCE

LIFE AT Kitty's house had a wonderful placidity about it. The winter was cool, and the sharp, sunlit days melted together until it was hard to keep track of even the weeks. I remember having to ask with irritating frequency, "What day *is* it? Thursday?"

"No, darling," Mother would always answer peacefully, "Saturday."

For the first month I was in Delhi I did practically nothing all day but sit on the verandas and read. At first the servants' children would stand and stare at me, but soon they became used to me and went about their play undisturbed, or watched the snake-charmers in the street, or the monkey man. The "magic-maker" was one of the favourite diversions. Catching sight of him on the street, they would rush out and drag him into the garden, then stand in the glaring sun, up to their ankles in dust, and gaze imploringly at me.

"*Jahdu-valla*, Miss Sahib! Don't you want to see his magic? He can make anything come true. *Please*, Miss Sahib?"

Actually I would have no say in the matter, for the *jahdu-valla* would be already crouched in the dust with his dirty white robes ballooning around him, unpacking the exciting bundle he carried on his back. Boxes and beads, magic handkerchiefs and all his equipment came pouring out on the drive-way. The children were ecstatic, gently touching the magic things and whispering among themselves while they waited for the show to begin.

The tricks themselves were much the same as in the conjuring shows that I had loved in England, but without their polish and

props. There were the usual card tricks, and the handkerchief that multiplied itself into three different-coloured scarves to become finally—instead of the Union Jack—the orange, green and white Nationalist flag. Or, again, the children were asked to draw—because, of course, they couldn't write—a picture on a piece of paper. The bearer's daughter would then step forward and with some assistance from me draw a four-petalled flower, crush the paper into a ball and hand it to the magician. After holding the paper for a moment he would throw it away, telling her that she kept her thoughts too well concealed for him to read what she had written merely by contact with the paper; he would have to feel the thought in her head. While she stood perfectly still, staring with immense eyes, not daring to blink, the *jahdu-valla* would place his fingers on her temples and mutter impressively, after which he would throw his head back and with an almost painful shout announce that he had felt the thought. The little girl had drawn a flower with four petals.

The performance over, the *jahdu-valla* would smile at me, his forehead shining with sweat—he really looked exhausted. The children meantime would hurry away, half frightened and half delighted. I could hear the words, "*Jahdu, jahdu,*" as they left.

Now came the embarrassing business of paying him. I could never do it casually and finally, the way Kitty and Mother did. Since I had not technically invited him in, I was not obligated to pay him as much as if he had been asked to entertain at a party.

The first time I appealed to Kitty. "Oh, pay him a few annas," she said. So I took ten annas out of my pocket, looked at them, hesitated, and was lost. The *jahdu-valla* saw at once that I was an amateur at bargaining. When I handed him the money he didn't even glance at it, but looked reproachfully at me.

"Miss Sahib, I have five hungry children at home. My wife cannot work, for she is sick and expecting another child as well. . . ."

I quickly put another six annas into his hand, bringing the total up to one rupee, but his whine continued.

"Miss Sahib, one performance like this is so great a strain on me that I am unable to make magic again for several hours. I don't resent having tired myself for your amusement, but . . ."

I added four annas to the mound of coins in his hand. "That's all you get," I said, with what I hoped was finality in my voice, and pretended I was about to go indoors.

"Salaam, Miss Sahib, salaam. May you marry soon, may your

husband be generous to you, may you have many children!" He walked backwards down the drive, bowing and salaaming. I watched him as he went into the garden next door and again began unpacking his bundle.

Kitty came out to tell me that it was lunch-time. "How much did you give the *jaňdu-valla*?"

"Ten annas," I said firmly.

"That's really more than they expect, you know. But, then, you are a novice at this, aren't you?"

Afternoon was the time for the vendors to make their house-to-house visits. The man with the saris called on us whenever he received a new supply of the kind we liked. Mother admired particularly the gold embroidery that is done only in Benares, so he saved these for her. Kitty wore mostly the heavy silks from Madras and the Gujerati prints; Premila and I wore Bombay georgettes and chiffons. We would all sit on the veranda while he spread the saris on the marble floor, held them against the light so that we could see they were flawless, or, like a magician, produced a match, lighted it and burnt a thread of the material to prove that it was pure silk.

The first few times Premila and I watched fascinated and uncritical as the vendor poured the brilliant stuffs into piles on the floor. Later we, too, learned to test the quality of the materials, admire the softness of the gold and silver tissue, look for weaknesses in the brocades. We came to take it for granted that the embroidery would never tarnish, because the thread was of real gold; when the silk wore out we had only to burn the borders and there was left a small lump of solid gold which could be spun again into thread. If we needed a brocade of a special design, or a unique sari border, we would tell the vendor, and he would bring our orders with him when he returned the following week. Shopping at the modern and well-stocked stores in the centre of New Delhi was more practical and much quicker, but Premila and I were foreigners enough, still, to prefer the leisurely and intimate methods of traditional India.

Sometimes, during the afternoon, Chinese and Tibetan travellers stopped at the house to display their jade and silk, embroidered robes and fine woollens. They seemed to have all the time in the world, and would willingly have stayed and talked for the rest of the afternoon.

In the evenings we usually played tennis. We worked out a

tournament system which allowed five of us to play without any one person being out of it for more than one set. The children from the neighbouring compounds would join our servants' children in staring at us, or they would appear over the garden wall and whisper and giggle about our strange meaningless game. If a tennis ball came near them, all the heads vanished simultaneously, and did not reappear for a couple of minutes. Only the braver boys tried to catch the ball. We must have been a very odd sight for them, because Mother and Shivan always played in Indian clothes, and Premila, Kitty and I wore tennis shorts and shirts.

If we felt like it, we invited the sons and daughters of Mother's and Kitty's friends over to the house in the evenings. After it became too dark to play tennis we used to go to the movies, or drive out to the Fort in Old Delhi and stroll through the Pearl Mosque, or stare at the inscription over the arch which led to the gallery built out over the river, "If there is any place of beauty and peace it is here, it is here."

As long as we went in groups Mother allowed us to do whatever we liked, but "single dates" were forbidden. This didn't bother Premila and me much, because we were almost always invited together to parties, but sometimes one of our friends who had no sister would call up and ask us to accompany her somewhere she couldn't go alone. As winter grew older the weeks were studded with embassy parties and Viceregal receptions. These functions seemed to me to be hopelessly removed from both the life of the villages of which I had caught a glimpse at Okhla, and even from the Indian city life which occupied our days at Kitty's.

On one occasion, during a lunch at Viceregal Lodge at which Mother, Premila and I were the only guests, I tried to fill an embarrassingly long conversational gap by telling the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, about Rashid's school. I tried to give him something of a picture of the village, the teachers in their Congress *khaddar*, and the children in their Gandhi caps. But he only answered with mock solemnity, "I have always believed that the only way to educate children is to make them learn from memory everything they hate most and beat them if they don't do it."

Always at the big parties, although ostensibly the English people and the Indians were mixing socially, we would gravitate towards our own group, and exchange only smiles and greetings with foreigners. We hardly ever invited them to our house, except to return hospitality, or if we knew they were good tennis-players.

Late in November we received a telegram from Asha announcing her arrival in Delhi on the day of the Divali holiday. Divali is a festival of lights marking the beginning of the Hindu business year. Its date is computed according to the phases of the autumn moon, and fell very late this year. Premila and I spent the whole morning with the servants' children, pouring oil into the tiny earthenware bowls and cutting cord into short pieces for wicks. Six hundred of the little lights cost us two rupees—about sixty cents—and the children were speechless with delight at our extravagance. They sat on the veranda making the lights, cross-legged and serious, each one marking his own special bowls. After they were finished all the servants and their children watched the bearer and the *mali* climb on to the flat roof of Kitty's house and place the lights along the parapets so that our house, like the others in New and Old Delhi, would have a border of brilliance that evening. Soon after sunset the wicks were lit, and through the short tropical twilight small spears of flame picked out the outline of every house.

As Kitty and Mother and I left for the station to meet Asha, the girls of the compound were walking down to the River Ganges to play their part in the Divali rites. Each girl must float her special light on the water and hope that it will drift to the other shore without being extinguished, for this will bring good luck in business to her family until the next Divali festival.

Along the bazaar streets shopkeepers were making up their accounts for the year, some were repainting their stores, while processions and bands gave the young people an excuse for shouting, dancing and waving their paper streamers and enormous papier-mâché images of Lakshmi, the goddess of plenty. On every corner sweets vendors were selling *burfi*—the Indian ice-cream—and *mitahis*—sweets—made in the shape of the heroes of the *Ramayana*. The station, too, was glaring with lights and paper decorations.

Asha walked down the platform looking subdued and neat, greeted us all formally, and gave us at once the little presents she had brought for us from Bombay. Mother received some *tika* specially prepared and blessed by our Brahmin, the family priest who had been visiting my grandmother for a few weeks before his return to our family home in the south. For Kitty there was some Bombay cocoanut oil perfumed with rosewater to use on her hair, and for me a small box of sweet *puris*.

"Grandmother remembered how well you liked these when

you were six years old. She was interested to know if you still like them."

On the way home, when Mother and Kitty were asking Asha her plans, she seemed unnecessarily evasive and quiet. Mother didn't press the point, and it was not until the next day that we discovered that Asha had not come up to Delhi to inquire about the Lady Willingdon Medical School at all, as we had thought. Quite unexpectedly after breakfast, when Shivan and Kitty had left, Asha turned to Mother:

"Dhan-*masi*, you know the Ananda Raos, do you not?"

Mother looked interested, but answered casually, "I haven't seen them for a very long time. Manorama and I were at college together in Madras many years ago. Are they in Delhi now?"

In an embarrassed burst the story came out. "*Masiji*, it is like this. Mama wants me to become engaged to their son—the elder one. He went to college at Oxford, and he has only been back in India for one year. Mama says that other families are waiting to see how he turns out and whether his career looks promising, but his mother has already spoken to Grandmother about it."

Mother looked at Asha a little strangely. It almost seemed as if she were angry about something. "They're certainly a very good family," she said carefully. "Manorama would be delightful as a mother-in-law, and I understand that they are one of the less orthodox of the old families."

Asha was obviously very upset. "I'm certain that must be so." There was a pause while she replaced her sari over her head and began to fiddle with the cotton threads at the end of the material. "The only trouble is that I do want to go to medical school."

"Can't you do both?" I asked.

"Not very easily," she replied. "I am told that he would wish to get married fairly soon. You see, his next assignment will be somewhere in the district, and he will need a wife to manage the servants and look after the rather difficult housekeeping out there."

"Well, why doesn't he hire a housekeeper?" Premila suggested.

Asha was shocked. "Oh, he could not do that. A man really *has* to have a wife in the districts."

"My dear," Mother said gently, "have you met him? Wouldn't that help you to make up your mind? After all, you are still very young. You needn't worry about these things just yet."

" But *Masiji*," she said earnestly, "I am already twenty-one."

"For heaven's sake!" Premila put in. "Do you *want* to marry the man or not?"

Mother said sharply, "Darling, try not to flaunt your ignorance of Indian ways. To begin with, I doubt if Asha has met him often enough to know whether or not she wants to marry him—how many times *have* you been with him, Asha?"

"Twice," said Asha, almost inaudibly.

"And secondly, there is no reason in the world to assume that the sentimental Western attitude that you two seem to have acquired about emotional matters is necessarily the right one. For my part, I doubt very seriously whether the average adolescent in the throes of her first emotional upheaval is capable of making an intelligent decision about the way the remainder of her life is to be lived." Premila subsided. With a change of tone Mother said to Asha, "Tell me, my dear, what you thought of him those times that you did meet him."

"I can hardly say. I was unable to talk to him much. The rest of the family were present, you see, and we addressed not more than a few sentences to each other."

"Is he attractive?" Premila asked through a mouthful of buttered toast.

Asha blushed. "He is not very fair, but his features are good."

"I always think," Premila said, "that you shouldn't marry a man that you wouldn't want to be seen with in a restaurant."

"Some one told me—I mean I knew his sister's friends in Bombay, one of them knows the family very well, and she said that he was rather, I mean sometimes he was jealous . . ." She looked at Mother in confusion. "That is only gossip, of course."

"Well," Mother said at last, "I don't think it's such a terrible problem. I'm sure you want to see the young man yourself and try to make some plans."

"That is why I came to Delhi."

"I suppose, as he will be leaving for the district so soon, you will have to decide immediately what you want to do." Mother hesitated. "I'll tell you what I'll do," she said. "I'll talk to Manorama myself and see what I can make of the situation. You want to miss as little of your college as possible, so meanwhile you can be inquiring at the Lady Willingdon about your plans for next year if you do go to medical school. I'm certain we shall be able to reach some compromise." Mother can be tremendously reassuring when she wants.

Asha's round serene little face relaxed. "Oh, would you really, *Masiji*? I need not see him alone?"

Mother watched her consideringly. "Asha dear, tell me what you really want to do. If there were no pressures, I mean, would you marry this boy or go to medical school?"

Very quietly Asha said, "Medical school." Then she added quickly, "Please do not think me disloyal. Mama and Grandmother want me to marry him—they say, quite rightly, that such a chance may never come again. There are very few good Saraswat Brahmin families left, and I am"—with a gasp—"very fortunate to be offered such an opportunity. I would always respect my husband——"

"Don't be absurd, Asha," Premila interrupted; "there is nothing sacred about Saraswat Brahmins."

"Thank goodness," said Mother unexpectedly.

Mrs. Anando Rao came to tea the next day. She was a short dark woman with a tired face. Her eyes looked enormous and myopic, for she used far too much *kajal*, and they seemed to water constantly. Her son who escorted her to the house stayed only a few moments because he had an official engagement soon afterwards. Premila said later that he was the kind of man who would have a black cotton sheath for his umbrella, but she is apt to be a little hard on dull men.

As soon as we had been introduced and Asha and Mrs. Ananda Rao had exchanged formalities, Mother said, "Darlings, I promised Kitty that you three would help her pour tea at the Children's Aid Society reception. The chauffeur will probably be waiting now." I know very few people who can seem to doubt mother's excuses, and Mrs. Ananda Rao was certainly not among them. Her excuses are always so obviously the conventional ones, and are delivered in a tone of such amused disbelief that you have to take them in the spirit in which they are given. She seemed to be saying to Mrs. Ananda Rao, "We both know that the girls must be dismissed. I invited you to tea only to talk to you about my niece, and you accepted only because you want to get this business settled as soon as possible, so why not be as frank as politeness permits?"

Taking the hint, Premila and Asha and I drove to Lady Willingdon College and interviewed deans and the board of admissions about Asha's plans. By the time we returned Mrs. Ananda Rao had left and Mother was sitting, smoking, in the drawing-room with the remains of the tea-things beside her and a rather smug expression on her face. Asha didn't say a word about

Mrs. Ananda Rao's visit, but plunged into an account of our afternoon findings.

Mother listened patiently, then said, "Oh, by the way, it's all settled about the Ananda Raos."

Asha said nothing; she was staring at the pattern of the carpet.

"What on earth did you tell her?" I asked.

"I really didn't have to *tell* her much. You can imply so much without really *saying* anything that isn't true."

Asha looked up at last. "Dhan-*masi*, you did not openly refuse her offer, did you? Mama would never forgive me."

"Not exactly. I just told her that my niece was faced with a rather tiresome problem and that I was worried about her. Marriage for her, I said, would mean giving up her medical work. It was Mrs. Ananda Rao who decided that she would prefer, on the whole, not to have a career girl for a daughter-in-law. So, you see, we didn't refuse anything at all—though I may have exaggerated your medical ambitions slightly . . ."

"This is very good of you, *Masiji*, but I am afraid Mama will feel that I may be something of a liability now, because there are few Indian mothers who wish a career girl for their sons."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. All the other mothers will think that Mrs. Ananda Rao is saying such things about you deliberately because you refused her son."

A couple of days later a messenger came from Mrs. Ananda Rao with a package for Mother. After dismissing the messenger Mother called Premila.

"Darling, would you like to get married?" she asked, as though it were the most ordinary thing.

Premila looked dazed. "Who, me?"

"Yes, to the Ananda Rao boy."

Premila looked at me. "I suppose," she said, "that it was too much to hope that the insanity in our family would stay hidden."

Mother smiled. "It *is* rather unconventional to propose again so soon, and into the same family, but they really must be in a terrific hurry, as the poor boy is leaving so soon."

"You're really serious?" Premila asked incredulously. "You mean Mrs. A. wants me to marry her son since Asha won't?"

"Exactly. She sent the horoscope over by a messenger just now."

"What does a horoscope have to do with it?"

Mother stared at Premila and me glumly. "It really was a mistake to take you two to Europe so young. I can only thank

whatever deity hates a social *faux pas* that I didn't have to send you both home to India alone." She pulled the horoscope out of its envelope. It was a yellowed and creased piece of paper written in what looked to me like hieroglyphics, but proved to be Sanskrit. "At every Hindu child's birth," Mother continued, "the position of the stars is plotted, and from that the family Brahmin or an astrologer makes the horoscope."

"Were ours done?" I asked.

"The position of the stars was recorded, but I never had the horoscopes made up, somehow."

"Well, even if her son *was* a beautiful baby, I don't know why Mrs. Ananda Rao should think we would be interested."

"When a mother is proposing to a girl for her son, the polite way of doing it is to send his horoscope to the girl's mother. If she plans to accept the proposal, the girl's mother sends back both her daughter's horoscope and that of her future son-in-law, saying that her Brahmin has compared them and that they match beautifully, auguring a long and happy marriage—and a fruitful one for the two young people. Then the boy's family Brahmin reads and compares the horoscopes."

"Just to see that there have been no astrological slips?" Premila said.

"Well, it's only a formality these days, but when I was a girl the Brahmins really did read them and give their opinions. I know of several promising matches that were broken up by an astrologer's veto. Anyway, if the girl's mother wants to refuse the proposal, she sends back the horoscope saying that to her extreme distress they do not compare favourably."

"I don't think," Premila said piously, "that you have been altogether fair to your daughters, Mother. I can see that I am going to have to refuse proposals and wither away just because I have no horoscope to compare with those of my suitors."

Mother looked rather worried. "You aren't planning to accept this, are you?"

"How can I?" Premila said tragically.

"You know, I *can* have your horoscope made up any time." She saw Premila laughing. "Besides," she added crossly, "it's cheaper than a shot-gun."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STARS ARE CONSULTED

EVEN AS Premila didn't mean to have her horoscope read, I didn't propose to be cheated of the experience, so a few days later I persuaded Mother to take me to an astrologer. Unfortunately she couldn't find the chart of the stars made when I was born, but as the event occurred on the spring festival of that year, it was probable that the astrologer she knew of had a chart covering the exact time.

"Did I ever tell you," she asked, "that your name means spring? It was a romantic impulse I have always regretted."

Arriving at the astrologer's, we climbed two flights of narrow, decaying stairs that led to his tiny place of business. We were invited in, given some very milky tea which tasted of honey and cloves and ushered to cushions on the floor. Then there was some bargaining about the cost of the transaction, after which the astrologer sent his boy to fetch the necessary records from another room.

"Exactly when was your daughter born?" he asked. He sat on the floor opposite us, with his legs crossed and his back uncomfortably erect, blinking good-humouredly through heavy-lensed spectacles. Like most of the educated workers I saw in India, he wore the Congress "uniform" of white hand-spun and hand-woven cotton, with the matching Gandhi cap, which he kept on even indoors. On his wrist was a narrow steel bracelet which caught the light as he moved his thin hands uneasily. His Urdu, a literary form of Hindustani, was exquisite—even with my sketchy knowledge of the language I could recognize that. He spoke slowly and gently, as if he used the words with affection, and studded his sentences with phrases from the great Indian poets and snatches of Sanskrit.

Mother frowned at his question. "I think it was around nine o'clock in the morning."

"I am sorry, but we must know more exactly than that. In our profession we must take account of the power of time. Everything is in process—even the stars. It is one minute in this eternity of change that we have to capture."

"I am not absolutely certain whether it was at five minutes *to* or five minutes *past* nine that my daughter was born."

"Ah, that is more easily settled." He called his assistant and

spoke to him, then read carefully the pages which the boy pointed out in an enormous, ragged book that looked more like a ledger than anything else. "If your daughter was born at five minutes after nine she would have two brothers; be of tall stature, but of dark skin. If it was at five minutes before nine, then she would have one sister, still be of tall stature, but with light skin."

"I have only one other daughter," Mother said. The conversation was carried on as though I were not present.

"Excellent. Then we have it exactly. My boy will write the facts down for you. If you will forgive me, I will absent myself for a few minutes. Whenever I present a horoscope I feel I should request divine blessing for an act that may prove to be presumptuous. After all, who are we to assume we can probe the great mysteries? We should offer thanks for the little that is shown us."

Mother stood up. "May my daughter and I accompany you? I think," she said softly, "I need the reassurance."

It occurred to me for the first time that Mother believed all this, that to her, as to the astrologer, this was a revelation of fact, not an interesting adventure in superstition.

We followed the astrologer into the next room, where we sat behind him on a small mat facing a shrine. The image in the shrine was decorated so heavily that I could not see which of the gods it was. It was covered with garlands and tinsel, and in front of it on a tray was a mound of *chameli* flowers—the strong, sweet-smelling Indian jasmin. The astrologer chanted in Sanskrit for a few minutes, and then rose, bowed to us politely, and walked ahead of us into the outer room.

When the horoscope was ready Mother offered him the money agreed upon, which he, according to tradition and manners, refused. She insisted. He insisted. Eventually we left, thanking him profusely for his kindness and generosity, while he assured us that we had honoured him by allowing him to serve us. At the door we paid the assistant.

I could hardly wait to reach home before I opened the package that the assistant had given us. I spread out the thin paper sheets before me and then stared at them, disappointed. They were in Urdu, and I could not read the script.

I called Mother at once from her room. "You can't possibly wait to change, Mother. *Please* come and read this horoscope for me."

She came out looking, as usual, as though she had done

nothing whatever all day. She read through the papers without saying a word, while I sat beside her, my impatience growing, and saying from time to time, "Well? . . . Well? . . ."

Having finished, she turned to the first page again. "Well, they certainly give you your money's worth," she said. "This is a horoscope of your last life as well as this one."

I was delighted. "Tell me what I was in my last life. Grandmother said Premila and I might have been pigeons, but she seemed to think that it was too good a fate for us—I mean too good a past."

"Nothing as exotic as that," Mother replied. "You were apparently a distinctly immoral girl and led a life full of purple passion that you are going to pay for in this life."

Premila came in on Mother's last sentence. "What a divine prospect!"

"Well, I don't know," said Mother, "if it will really be awfully gay. You seem to have had all your fun in your previous existence. Apparently you were an Indian girl then too, but with less control than I like to think you have now. You married some man for his money, and then ran off with some other man. I'm sure I don't know what I ever did to have a child like you."

"Is that all?"

"Oh no; then you assisted at the murder of your brother, whom you disliked because he stood in the way of your departure with the handsome stranger. The punishment for *that* piece of adventure is that you won't have a brother in either this life or your next. Fine thing! Now perhaps you will realize what far-reaching consequences your actions can have. I would have loved to have had a son."

"But what about this life?" I asked. The whole thing had a wonderfully familiar country-fair ring to it.

"He seems to have got the facts of your early life straight, at least: how old I was when you were born, the fact that you left India when you were six. They give a couple of years leeway for all their dates, but they do have our various trips across Europe correct—even the journey to South Africa——"

"But that's amazing!" I said. "There must be a trick to it. How can they possibly know all those things about us?"

Mother smiled. "It would not be the first thing we have failed to understand."

"Perhaps they ask the servants," Premila suggested. "They know all about our lives—private and public."

"I hope," said Mother sharply, "that there is no reason why they shouldn't."

Premila laughed. "Darling, of course not! Just that there is nothing so very miraculous about these horoscopes, after all."

"But they tell the future too, don't they?" I wanted to know.

"All right then, what about the future? Tell us about *that* . . ."

Mother began to fold up the papers. "I don't know," she said, "that I will. I think that for people brought up in the Western modes of thought it would probably do as much harm as good." Suddenly I saw that she was completely in earnest. She wasn't laughing with us any more. "You see, this is a destiny which you cannot change, and for you, bred to believe in the power of human will, it would be disturbing if you did believe in it, and rather ridiculous if you didn't. Neither is the right attitude."

"But Mother," I said, "you read your own horoscope, and you aren't falling to pieces—philosophically or any other way."

"I know, dear; but if you were told as a fact that you would die at the age of fifty-six—as I was—I doubt if you could live with equanimity waiting for your fate."

"You mean, you *believe* you will die at fifty-six?" I asked incredulously.

"I *know* it, darling, and it isn't a question of belief."

"Crikey!" said Premila, "but you aren't any different! I mean I should think you'd live *towards* that age—if you see what I'm getting at."

"That," said Mother, "is exactly what I mean."

I saw that she didn't plan to say any more about either her horoscope or mine, and if I brought up the subject later she would be busy and evasive. So I decided upon a direct attack.

"Mother," I said, "did your horoscope work out right?"

She seemed a little embarrassed. "As a matter of fact, it has so far. It gave most of the vital statistics correctly—the date of my marriage (which was unusually late for an Indian girl in those days); the dates you two were born and that kind of thing. It isn't very detailed, you know. One should really have a horoscope re-read every few years to have precise information about the immediate future."

"It seems strange, then, that Asha's mother should be upset about her not marrying that boy. After all, she must have known it would happen that way from the horoscopes."

"Oh, they allow for change, and they usually give a margin of time. All the same, I can see that there is a paradox." In a different voice she said, "Does all this seem quaintly superstitious to you?"

"Doesn't it to you?"

"No, I'm afraid I understand it—I doubt if you ever will. Oh dear." She began to wander off towards the veranda.

"I say, Mother, don't go away," I called after her. "Do tell me what it says in my horoscope—just vaguely. You needn't give me the details if you don't want to."

"Well, darling, it seems we are going to leave India again. Your horoscope says that you will travel far across water. I suppose that means that your father will be assigned to London when he returns from South Africa." She sounded sad. "I had hoped that we were home for good this time. I'm very tired of being a foreigner."

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEYOND THE GARDEN WALL

IT WAS an easy life at Kitty's—frighteningly easy if one wanted, as Premila and I did, to learn about the people of India. For it was possible to live with Kitty, meet her friends, visit them in their homes—for Indians prefer to entertain at home—play tennis with their sons and daughters, and move through the days without thought for the majority of Indians, who are as foreign as the Germans or the French. This is true in Delhi especially, where social activities are dictated to a great extent by the "official set".

To us, the obligations and amusements of the Government servants seemed calculated to keep them from any contact with the people for whom they were presumably working. Certainly the officials we met in Delhi were as far from being what we privately called "real Indians" as we were ourselves. Could it be the lesser Government workers, those assigned to the villages and districts, who did the true governing of the country? But that posed another problem: the people who were now living in the cities and adopting ways increasingly Western must sometime in their careers have lived in the villages as lesser Government workers. Had they forgotten? We could reach no satisfactory answer.

Beyond the wall of Kitty's home was another life. When we walked out of the garden we were at once in a foreign country. Here were people sleeping on the sidewalks in the patches of shade, whole families sitting with their backs to the garden walls which lined the roads. They stared at us without moving and apparently without envy as we stepped cautiously around them. Sometimes the children would come up and beg for coppers, but we had learned to refuse without feeling callous because it seemed the only way to keep from getting stranded in a bog of children whining for money. Sometimes the women would smile at us, but if we smiled back they would turn away, shy and enigmatic. We wondered then if this was evidence of the mysterious Oriental soul, but when we put it to Mother she said that it was more probably a conditioned fear of the foreign and the powerful.

In the side streets of Delhi (the authorities like to keep the main roads clean and pleasant) we often saw families cooking their meals on little charcoal-burners on the sidewalks. The fathers and the children would sit on their heels in the typically Indian way and watch the mothers cooking the food. Occasionally there was a tin box or a roll of bedding carefully guarded by one of the children. At first Premila and I were naïve enough to think that picnics were in progress, though a city street seemed a strange place to choose, but when we spoke of it at home we were met with an incredulous stare from Shivan. He turned to Mother and said, "Good God, Dhan! It must have taken the best years of your life to keep these girls so ignorant." The families we had seen actually lived on the sidewalks. They collected what food they could find in garbage cans, and if they could make any money begging they would buy themselves the other necessaries.

One day Premila and I made a small experiment. We went down to one of the poorest food bazaars to find out what was the most food we could buy for a pice, which is about the sum a family spends for a meal. It seemed to us incredible that one could buy anything at all for half a penny, but apparently millions of people were doing it. We spent about two hours in our search, bargaining with merchants, looking for lower prices, and found that the most a pice would buy was a large *chapati*—the thin Indian wheat cake—and one onion. Of course, the "real Indians" would have been able to get more for the money than we did, but not enough to make the difference between semi-starvation and a minimum healthy diet.

After that I felt a distinct bitterness and some scorn for the

Western visitors whom we met in Kitty's home. Most of them came with letters of introduction from people Shivan and Kitty had known somewhere and had all but forgotten, and it was their habit to talk with enthusiasm of the Indian soul and ask Shivan endless questions about Hindu philosophy. Premila and I would catch each other's eye, feeling that philosophic speculation is something that goes with brandy after a good dinner. For the first time I began to feel that I was ranged, however ineffectively, on the side of the Indians. I was not clear about what our side was against, but now when I saw benches on a station platform marked "For Europeans only", it was a personal insult; when I read in the papers of student demonstrations that were severely punished, I shared something of the students' anger and frustration; when I saw servants curling up to sleep on doormats or in hotel passage-ways, I felt, not embarrassed as before, but resentful of a vague "They" who had caused all this. Sometimes "They" were the foreigners who were exploiting Indians, and sometimes "They" were Indians who were exploiting each other.

The winter of 1939–40 was, looking back on it, a disturbing time in spite of the surface calmness of our life in Delhi. The constant movement of Indian politics, the meetings and interviews, statements by the Viceroy, replies from the Indian leaders, all kept Shivan very busy. Kitty, too, was working hard. She and Mother were both involved in India's great women's movements. If I asked to accompany them to meetings Mother would sometimes agree. The range of their activities was enormous—adult literacy, child welfare, housing, slum clearance, unemployment, malnutrition, and seemingly every other social and socio-political problem. Before I knew anything about them I had thought of Mother's groups as the kind of genteel ladies' clubs which mixed a little charitable work with tea-drinking and gossip. But I found that they were made up of informed, professionally hard-working women, dramatically different from the retiring, domestic creatures foreigners pictured Indian women to be.

Although these women were doing admirable and in some ways heroic work, the situation in certain respects was shocking, for the duties they took upon themselves were ones ordinarily discharged by Government through legislation or subsidy, or at least left to professional private concerns. It was appalling that problems as important as literacy and housing should depend on the philanthropy of individuals.

Many of the societies to which Mother belonged carefully

avoided an open political affiliation, although in certain projects they co-operated and shared workers with the Congress Party. Mother explained that this was because so few workers proportionately were available that organizations could not afford to lose any of them as political prisoners. For herself, she is too impatient and energetic to feel useful unless she is active.

With all her outside activities she couldn't act as our interpreter for India here, as she had in Bombay, and Premila and I were left to collect our impressions for ourselves from the insignificant incidents of daily life in Delhi. Meeting the college students and other Indians of our own age, we still felt rather like strangers. Our English accents were uncomfortably pronounced, we could not talk in the rapid mixture of Hindustani and English that so many of our new acquaintances used. Still, on the whole, we felt we belonged with them rather than with the sporty young English set. Among ourselves we used to call the English girls who came to spend a season with relatives in India after they had "come out" in England, the Fishing Fleet. We felt pleasantly superior and a little sorry for them, because they seemed to have no secure background of family and friends, because they had to entertain and be entertained in night clubs and hotels—a sad sign that they had no home to which they would care to invite friends—and because after they left India they would never be able to lead this kind of life again. In England they would probably live in suburbs and provincial towns without the money or social position to join the successful London débutantes. It must have been demoralizing for them to leave England as daughters of small Government workers or branch bank managers and suddenly to find themselves the privileged leaders of Anglo-Indian society.

Our friends were, of course, constantly concerned with the problems of Indian politics. Most of them, the college students particularly, felt a tremendous responsibility towards the people of India. They knew themselves to be important members of that ten per cent of India's population which is literate, and of the even smaller fraction which is educated. When we met at their homes, the talk inevitably turned to politics, and Premila and I had learned by now to join in. The difference was that we could do nothing but talk, while the others were deeply involved in committees and schemes to help the Congress Party in its social duties. During their vacations the students used to conduct adult literacy classes in the villages, or travel through the villages

around Delhi to instruct the peasants in progressive methods of farming, rotation of crops, collective farms and crop insurance. Most of them considered this work more important than their college studies.

If they went to English colleges in India, St. Stephens in Delhi or the Elphinstone in Bombay—and often there was no choice—they not infrequently campaigned against those colleges on the score that a Government was unsuitable that provided a completely English education for Indians. Even the Indian universities at Benares and Aligahr had English as a compulsory language and the English system of examinations. I spoke of this to Mother one evening, and I remember her reply: "How depressingly slow progress is! The same thing happened to us when I was a girl, and I was hoping that it had changed. I, too, was horrified when I graduated from 'Indian' schools and found that while I knew Chaucer backwards I had not the faintest knowledge of Indian literature, history, or art. Most of us spoke one language at school—English—and another at home—Hindustani—and ended by knowing neither well. That was really the main reason that I took you two to England for your schooling. I thought you might as well get the genuine article."

Among the young Indians we met there was, besides an omnipresent nationalistic conscience, a great seriousness. They were seldom frivolous, never facetious. I think they felt that we were rather irresponsible because Premila would often make slightly irreverent remarks on solemn occasions, and I would laugh at them. But they were unfailingly helpful and eager to explain. We both admired and felt at ease with them, but never really belonged. We had been abroad too long. We still had, for instance, to wear pins to secure our saris.

CHAPTER NINE

EDUCATION IS A TWO-WAY PROCESS

By slow degrees we were learning some of the things we needed to know. A fact picked up here, another there, added to our store of knowledge.

At one of the student gatherings somebody mentioned Ashok Kumar. We had known him in London while he was going to

the London School of Economics, and Mother had acted as his guardian when his parents could not be in England. Premila and I pounced on his name—here at last was someone who really spoke the same language we did, here was someone with whom we would not feel polite and unfamiliar. I asked the girl who had spoken of him where he was and what he was doing. She looked at me, surprised that I did not know.

"He is in the camp for *détenus*, of course. All his friends are. He was working for the Congress left wing, writing pamphlets and so on. We won't be seeing anything of those boys for a long time now, though occasionally we get letters from him."

"Well, when will he be released?"

"Nobody knows," she explained. "You see, they are imprisoned without a trial and without a sentence. It isn't usually longer than a few months the first time. He was your friend in England, wasn't he?"

"Yes, we knew him very well."

"When you people with a foreign education really understand your own country again, you often turn out to be the best workers." She looked at us hopefully for the first time.

This was food for thought, and Premila and I discussed the matter on the way home. I asked her if she didn't think it strange that Ashok should be in prison for his Nationalist work. I remember him as a studious unpolitical boy, and she said, "Oh no. I think one is forced to take political sides in India these days, and if Ashok takes an attitude, he has to act on it. That's exactly where I would have expected to find him."

I looked at her surprised. Somehow I always assume that Premila will react to things as I do. It occurred to me for the first time that perhaps she was having no trouble in reconciling her European upbringing and tastes with life in this overwhelmingly foreign country. Her flippancy might very well have come from habit or the wish to amuse me when she saw I was becoming, as she puts it, "tense about finding the wheel within the wheel". I asked her whether she wanted to return to college at Cambridge, or ever return to England, for that matter.

She said, "I don't think so now. I did for a while when we first arrived—I thought perhaps all of India was going to be like Grandmother's house. But now it seems to me too much like building fences that you'll have to pull down again so soon."

"You mean you don't *care* about finishing college, and not going back to Europe and all that?"

She tilted her head to one side and stared. "Of course I'm not as ambitious as you are. That may account for it."

"I'm not ambitious!"

"I mean ambitious the way a squirrel is ambitious. You keep hoping that you can go on hoarding indefinitely all the things you learn and see."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not hoarding anything. I don't know what I have to hoard."

"Oh well, it's not important. You see, I think Kitty is a really smart woman. I don't think there is any point in looking for compromise. You've got to give up one or the other, and since, as far as I can see, we are going to have to live in India, I, for one, am going to give up Europe."

"Like Kitty?"

"Almost, but I'm going to do more of what I like and am used to, on the side, than she does. That is, as far as comfort and morality allow."

"How do you mean—morality?"

"Well, I think those students we were with tonight are right. I wouldn't want to hinder them, but I'm not sure that I would help them if it meant a great deal of responsibility."

"I think you make everything too simple," I said. "I'm sure there's a feasible and good compromise."

"I know. You always were an optimist." She wouldn't talk about it any more.

On thinking over what she had said, I could see that my "problem"—understanding India and Indians—didn't bother Premila at all. She was already thinking in fairly exact terms of the kind of life she would make for herself in India. It must mean that she is already a step ahead of me, I thought.

When we reached home we found Mother entertaining Hannah Sen, one of her oldest and closest friends, the president of the Lady Irwin College for Home Economics. Mrs. Sen called to us in her deep voice as we came up the veranda steps, "I was just leaving and I thought I had missed you two."

She was collecting her bag and wrap and talking at the same time when we entered the drawing-room. "I really mustn't stay another minute," she said, addressing me, "but I did want to ask you if you would help me out at the college."

"Of course. What would you like me to do?"

"One of our English lecturers has had to go home for a few days—illness in the family, I think—and we can't get the usual substitute. Would you take over two of her lectures?"

"But I don't know anything to lecture on—I mean not to college students," I protested. "I haven't even been to college myself!"

"You wouldn't have to be erudite, you know." Mrs Sen was laughing. "Just tell them about going to school in England, what you were taught, what the differences were—that kind of thing. I'll expect you at nine on Thursday. I don't see nearly enough of you girls. Dhan, why don't you bring them to dinner with you one day soon? Doctor and my baby are really impatient to see them after all these years." She hurried off to her car.

"Mother," I said, horrified, "I can't lecture to Mrs. Sen's students. They'll all be older than I. Why can't Premila do it?"

"I wasn't asked," Premila said. "Besides, I'm the pretty one, *you're* the clever one."

Mother only said, "Don't be silly, dear ; you'll take it in your stride." There is no situation that Mother doesn't think we can "take in our stride".

Premila wanted to know why Mrs. Sen was the president of the Lady Irwin College. "She doesn't have to work, does she? After all, Doctor Sen has a pretty big practice."

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," Mother answered. "Hannah is an extremely competent woman, and goodness knows we have few enough Indian women who could handle a job like that. You two don't seem to realize that these days no Indian woman can afford to waste her talents. If Hannah were a millionaire she would still keep on working. Her experience is too valuable a commodity to be wasted."

All Wednesday evening I tried to work out some kind of a speech which would tell the girls at the Lady Irwin College about St. Paul's without sounding too solemn and formal. On Thursday morning I reached the college only to discover that I had left my notes at home. I was too embarrassed to tell Mrs. Sen.

When I looked at the room full of girls with their notebooks open and their pencils ready, I had a moment of paralyzing stage-fright. They looked efficient and a little sceptical. Most of them wore their hair in braids, sleek and black, sometimes with flowers twined through and sometimes tied with woollen pom-

poms. Very few of them wore any make-up, and the ones who did used no rouge or lipstick. Except for three or four girls who I guessed were Anglo-Indians, all the students wore cotton saris, usually white with coloured borders, and often the colours of the Nationalist flag. They all stared at me in complete silence. Even after the lecture they asked no questions, made no comments, just filed silently out of the hall. A second class acted in exactly the same way. Even the few girls I knew out of college and smiled at hopefully during the lecture said nothing, but smiled back politely. I returned home shaken and cross.

A few days later, when I saw Mrs. Sen again, I told her what had happened, and asked her if her students were always so unresponsive. "Oh, no," she said, "usually quite the reverse. They give their teachers a great deal of discussion and argument. I think they rather resented your enthusiasm about your school. You see, it's quite hard to make them forget their prejudice against the British and all their works. They feel tremendously *privileged* by their education, and they find it a little hard to ignore the fact that so few of their countrymen have the fundamental rights—like education—that other peoples take for granted. Perhaps they thought you were defending an educational system that has encouraged great liberal and democratic thought for its own country and nothing but reaction for ours."

"But it *is* a good education," I insisted, "in England, at least."

Mrs. Sen smiled thoughtfully. "You know, everyone involved in schools and colleges develops his own educational theories sooner or later. My pet one is that a good education should produce teachers, not students. If the British have really a democratic education, it should teach them democracy in something more than an insular sense, and they should spread that to other countries, not hinder it."

Apparently Mrs. Sen told some of the students that I had found my first lecturing job a discouraging experience, because the next day a few of the girls came to call at Kitty's house about tea-time. We chatted warily until everyone had been served, and then one of the girls suddenly asked me if I knew anything about editing a college magazine. I told them that I had never had anything to do with one, but that Premila had edited the school magazine at St. Paul's.

"Indeed?" Malati raised her eyebrows politely, but paid no attention to Premila. "In that case your sister could be of some assistance to you."

"In what?" Premila asked unexpectedly, hearing her name spoken.

"Mrs Sen suggested that you would be good enough to help us with the English section of the Lady Irwin paper," Malati continued, as though Premila had not spoken. "Could you come over tomorrow and see the editor about it?"

"I really don't think I'd be of much use," I said.

"You are being too modest." Malati got up to go, and her two friends rose too. "Our English editor couldn't come, but she will look forward to meeting you after classes tomorrow."

"Our English editor" turned out to be an Anglo-Indian girl; I wondered if that was the reason that she had not been brought to call the day before. For these girls, snobbish about practically nothing else, still retained some of the conventional superiority to Eurasians. They called them Flying Fish—neither fish nor fowl. The editor was a sweet, rather submissive girl, called Janine. Instead of the sleek braided Indian hair-do which I now expected to find on Indian girls, she wore her hair in curls with a bow at each side. She wore make-up, short dresses, high heels and appeared to apologize for them all. She knew they branded her as an Anglo-Indian, but with an English name she felt strange in Indian clothes– it might seem as if she were trying to pass herself off as a member of a group towards which she could not help feeling a certain antagonism.

She introduced herself with a slight American accent, and I asked her at once where she had been to school. I hoped that it would be America, because America seemed to all of us a remote and wonderful land– freedom, education, opportunity for everybody. But Janine told me that she had graduated from an American school in India, Woodstock. It had been started for the children of Americans in India who wanted to be sure that there would be no problems in entrance requirements when their sons and daughters were ready for college in America. It was still run on the American plan, and one of its typically American features was a year book brought out by each graduating class, complete with pictures, class prophecies and a space for signatures at the end. Janine had not helped to bring out the year book, but because she knew at least what it was, she had been chosen to edit the college magazine.

I was fascinated with the book and with everything Janine had to tell me about American education. It was the first contact, however indirect, that I had had with an American school, so I

kept her talking until almost dinner-time without giving her any help at all with the college magazine, *Jagrati*. After she had explained what a sophomore was, and made it clear that even a girl could be a freshman, when she had mapped out the daily routine and simplified the system of credits, hour work and semester divisions, she asked tentatively whether I wanted to see the English contributions to *Jagrati* and if I would help her select the best to put in the magazine. I assured her rather guiltily that I would go through them and come and see her again in a day or two, when we could pool our opinions.

As I was leaving she asked if I were planning to go to an American college. I told her I was longing to go to America, but didn't think it would be possible until after the war.

"How about you?" I said.

"Oh no," Janine replied. "I'm going to be married as soon as I graduate from Lady Irwin's. He's Indian." She answered the question I would have liked to ask. "He's in the British army in Singapore right now."

That night Premila and I read through the contributions to *Jagrati*. There was one poem, a metrically perfect sonnet, competent and dull; everything else was prose on serious subjects—the possibilities of co-education in India, the place of the student in Indian political life, the value of literacy as a political weapon, and so on—no short stories, no light articles, no sketches. The English was precise and clear and the ideas well presented, but Premila and I were disappointed. There was nothing to tell us what these girls were like. I wrote a short report on the contributions as a whole, selected the ones I liked and sent them all back to Janine. When *Jagrati* appeared I found that Janine had followed my suggestions exactly, and had even printed my report as a sort of preface.

I took the magazine to Mother to show her that the Lady Irwin students had extended a strange but unembarrassing apology. She flipped through the pages, then began reading the section in Hindustani. "What delightful stuff this is!" she said. In this section there were no serious articles, but a great deal of poetry and, unexpectedly, several allegorical stories and sketches.

I had never learned the Hindustani script, and for the first time I regretted my lack of knowledge. There was a great deal about India that was worth learning, but somehow I didn't have the equipment to begin. I could observe. I could try to interpret what I saw, but, as the student and the young political workers

had sensed, I wasn't a "real Indian". The truth faced me at every turn. At first, during those early weeks in Bombay, I hadn't really wanted to be a part of the Indian people. I had wanted to return to England, graduate from Oxford, and India had seemed like an interlude—interesting, but quickly over, not a place to spend one's life. It was too foreign, too inexplicable by my Western standards; I couldn't fit in it anywhere, with my upbringing. But India was changing even in my mind. It was no longer just a subject for a travelogue, but a place having a culture and a people worth understanding. After all, I was a part of the great Indian struggle for independence, and I found, to my surprise, that I resented being considered a rather ignorant outsider by the politically minded students. I wanted to be accepted by them, to be a "real Indian". What Premila had said was true. I did want to find a compromise, but I was beginning to think that if a compromise were impossible and I had to make a choice between Europe and India—I might choose India. Here things were just beginning, here anybody could be a pioneer. But it was more than just the romance. I really felt an Indian identity for the first time. I was already being made a little uncomfortable by the responsibilities of my new status.

About that time I was asked to give a few talks on the All-India Radio, the only broadcasting system in India, owned by the British Government in India. Lionel Fielden, who was then the Controller, had come to dinner with Kitty and Shivan a few days before. He had the reputation of being "pro-Indian", and was full of half-irritated, half-amused stories of the official red tape with which he found himself tied. A few days earlier, for instance, the assistant controller of the station had fallen down a well in the compound of the radio station. As the Public Works Department was in a building only a few steps away, one of the doormen was sent there to fetch a rope. The officials who sent him felt very virtuous because they were complying with Government regulations requiring employees to use only Government materials, however great the emergency. The doorman returned with the information that all requests to the Public Works Department must be submitted in writing. The assistant controller was pulled out of the well with the reins of an obliging *tongavalla's* horse.

Fielden was very much concerned with methods to improve relations between the British in India and the Indians. He had answered the people who held that the many languages of India

were a barrier to unity by proving that most of the listening public of the country could be reached by Hindustani, with a few programmes in Tamil and Maharati for the far south. It was Fielden's idea that Premila and I should talk about our impressions of India after so many years in Europe, what we thought Europe had to teach Indians in culture, education, and skills, and what, in return, Europeans could learn from India. Premila refused flatly, saying that was the kind of talk one gave after one had been in the country only two days. I understood what she meant.

The upshot was that the programme director gave me some books to review in a fifteen-minute talk from eight o'clock to a quarter past. For this I received fifty rupees—about sixteen and a half dollars. I did a few more talks for them that winter when someone was needed to fill in or substitute. But as "the season" got under way I found I had less and less time for work of any sort. There was not even time to sit on the veranda and stare at the strange life of the Delhi streets.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SEASON

THE OPENING of "the season" coincided with the beginning of the very cold weather just before Christmas. "The season" consisted of endless parties. In the mornings, if it was too cold to play tennis, we met at someone's house to go group shopping. If one of our friends was getting married, we would help her choose her trousseau, and drive out to Old Delhi with her to place her orders for jewellery with the craftsmen in Chandni Chowk—"the street of moonlight". It was here that the work in gold and silver was done, and the shining wares of the shops had given the street its name. We learned that it is considered poor manners to give anyone a present of money if the amount is a round number. A bride will receive cheques for 99 rupees or 101 rupees because a gift of 100 rupees would mean that the century was completed and the giver did not want her to have the prosperity of starting on the second hundred.

A standard form of amusement was to wait in front of Delhi's best hairdresser every other Tuesday to watch the Viceroy's

car drive up, preceded by official attendants carrying a red carpet. The sidewalk was covered from the car to the shop. Lady Linlithgow went in to have her hair done. For lunch or during the afternoon we would have "*purdah* parties" to which only women were invited.

Premila and I just sat and watched at our first *purdah* luncheon, too interested even to eat. All the food was served by ayahs, so the orthodox Mohammedan women could remove their veils. Many of them told us that their husbands wouldn't mind if they decided to come out of *purdah* completely. In fact, most of the husbands in Government service would prefer it. Already many women had given up the old tradition and would meet other men than their husbands; for an official who has a great deal of entertaining to do a wife who will act as hostess at his parties is not only a graceful asset, but almost a necessity. In spite of this, though, a few of the women told us quite frankly that they thought the social freedom—they said "licence"—of Western women would be a distinct disadvantage. They found their lives pleasant, free of too much responsibility, and secure. Besides, they said, look at the loss in femininity of the Englishwomen. They had nothing but scorn for the flat-chested foreigners with their red and sunburnt skins and short, colourless hair.

We asked them how they kept their own complexions so clear and delicate. Obviously they used no foreign cosmetics. The answer was that most of them still used the old Indian recipe for complexion soap—lentil flour mixed with water or milk to make a heavy paste for a face-pack. Their other make-up tricks, unlike those of Europeans, had a medicinal as well as a beautifying value. To them their hair was the most important feature, and they usually washed it every day. (Friends of ours from South India kept up that habit even in England, where the climate was too damp to make it practical or comfortable.) In the old days women used the water of boiled avalas—an Indian fruit—to wash their hair, but nowadays it is much easier to use the ready manufactured Indian water-softeners. They still oil their hair very heavily, partly to counteract the drying effects of the climate, and partly because glossy hair is considered attractive. Today the simpler coiffures are fashionable, but in the villages of India the women seem to feel that the more complicated the braids the more beautiful the effect. In Kashmir you see the most difficult, and therefore the most attractive, of these hair styles—a thin braid of three to six hairs plaited along the hairline to outline

the forehead, while the rest of the hair is pulled into dozens of narrow braids, and finally worked into a thick braid reaching to the waist.

The women, I observed, were careful, too, of their manicures. Their nails were very short and never enamelled, because most of them prefer to eat with their fingers, and because the good Indian wife must always be ready to take over the work in the kitchen in case of a domestic crisis. *Mehendi* leaves boiled and tied round the nails for a few hours will give the finger-tips an indelible red stain traditionally considered attractive. Indian girls use *mehendi* on the palms of their hands and on their knuckles as well, and they rub the soles of their feet with a red powder called *Alta*.

Altogether the *purdah* parties were brief, exciting journeys into the lives of Indian women of a century or so ago, and a marked contrast to the season's evening parties. The latter would start at somebody's cocktail party, or at a legation or embassy reception. There we would meet a group of friends, one of whom would invite all of us to dinner. Frequently Premila and I took ten or more people home to Kitty's on little or no notice. These impromptu dinners never seemed to upset anyone's household arrangements. The meal was always on time and carefully elaborate. The servants apparently expected avalanches of guests and were ready for them. After dinner we went in a gang to the movies, or to dance at one of the New Delhi hotels, or to concerts or dance recitals. Driving home at night through the deserted Delhi streets one of us might suggest going out to Kutub Minar, a wonderful old tower about twenty miles beyond the city, where it was fun to wander through its pillars and monuments, our high heels clicking on the marble, our foreign furs held tightly over our Indian silks and chiffons as protection against the chill winter nights. We could hear our English accents echoing back from the tower. On the way home we would sing English and American popular songs.

At these parties, with Mother's approval, Premila and I drank champagne if it was served, but we were not allowed to drink hard liquor. This was considered "fast". Whenever we went out it had to be with a group of four or more, and we could go unchaperoned only when our dates were friends of the family. We could never go out alone with a man, even to play tennis at the club or to have lunch with his family, unless he had sisters who were also friends of ours and were going to be present.

Very few of our acquaintances among the students and political

workers were present at the season's parties. "The set" consisted almost entirely of young officials, professional men and their wives and a few journalists. I suppose most of the students were working hard for their winter examinations, because their quieter gatherings were less frequent.

Occasionally politics would break rudely into our social life when someone guilty under the Defence of India Ordinance was sent to prison or to a *détenu* camp. I have in mind Krishna, a student friend of mine with active radical sympathies. He had given me a few copies of the Indian Communist paper, *National Front*, which I had read and then forgotten. Soon afterwards we heard that he had disappeared and that a police search was being conducted for him; there was even a price on his head. He was accused of belonging to the Community Party and of carrying on seditious activity among the Indian villagers.

At a reception given by the Japanese Legation a few days after this news broke, one of the junior English officials whom I knew slightly came up to me and began to make polite small talk. He was obviously embarrassed, then evidently decided to come right out with what was on his mind. He was, it appeared, something to do with the British Criminal Investigation Department, and because I was counted as "diplomatic", I deserved a warning. He knew that I had a few copies of *National Front*, and he was trying, rather painfully and with genuine kindness, to tell me to get rid of them.

"Of course," he said, "I realize it doesn't mean a thing in your case. Naturally you wouldn't be interested seriously in a thing like that, not here at least. Used to be quite interested in it myself—at Cambridge, that is. Young blood——" He stopped, realizing that he wasn't saying quite what he meant. "None of my business, of course, but if I were you I'd destroy them. You see, if we know you have them we're more or less bound to come and look around." I wondered if he meant search the house. "Pretty unpleasant and all that, and of course, quite unnecessary in this case . . ." I marvelled at the system of servant gossip and careful observation which must have given him this information. It was quite possible that I had left the papers on the veranda, where I had been reading them.

We watched the hunt for Krishna as it developed, until finally he was caught in an obscure village and sent to a *détenu* camp. For us the incident, which was hardly more than a shadow on our activities, was ended.

Christmas and New Year's brought more parties without special celebration. We exchanged small useful gifts, and that was all to mark the week apart. By the end of January the season had tired itself out, and before the middle of February life in Delhi again became calm and uneventful.

As the weather suddenly became much hotter, people began to talk about moving to the hills. By March the unwieldy machinery of the government had started to transport itself and its workers to Simla for the summer months. One wonders what brand of insanity prompted the British to choose Delhi as official headquarters, when the place is considered almost uninhabitable six months of the year.

Then one morning Mother came in to breakfast and asked for iced instead of hot coffee. "We must really begin thinking about our summer plans," she said.

"Aren't we going to stay here?" I asked, surprised.

"Goodness, no! It's apt to get up to a hundred and twenty degrees in the shade before the rains."

"Well, where are Kitty and Shivan going?"

Kitty looked up from the paper. "We have to follow the Government to Simla. It would kill Shivan to get out of touch. I don't think he has ever taken a real holiday."

Mother said, "I have had altogether too much of the Government life. I see no reason for us to go to Simla unless we have to. I've always wanted to take you two up to Kashmir—it's my family home, though we have been away from it for so long that I'm a stranger there too."

Kitty looked wistful. "How I wish I could go with you!"

"Why don't you, Kitty? You could leave Shivan in Simla for a few weeks and join us in Srinagar, and ——"

"Stop, before you make me too envious! If I could get a good reliable nursemaid for Shivan, just to see that he doesn't stop eating completely, and that he doesn't rush off to Wardha to get a statement from Gandhi on everything that happens . . . Sometimes I think that Shivan has had only one sane and conscious moment when his mind was not on politics, and in that moment he married me."

If someone had offered me a trip to Ruritania I could not have been more excited. I went down to the stationer's that afternoon and bought two loose-leaf notebooks, which I labelled "Kashmir Journal". Then we started packing. There was a rush of farewell parties before we left Delhi near the end of March. As it hap-

pened, our departure coincided with the festival day, Holi, and on the way to the station we watched from the car the rowdy celebrations in the bazaars. People were shouting and throwing red paint at each other, the air was full of confetti, and the children (who go to bed any time they please on ordinary days) were looking forward to the prospect of staying up all night. We felt very much out of it all.

In the station, too, the Holi crowds had collected. Kitty and Shivan stood on the platform and waved to us as our train pulled out. When we waved back, the whole crowd responded with raised hands, thinking, of course, we were saluting them. We were passing the last of the crowd, and I, feeling an inclusive affection for all Indians, was saying sentimentally, "I don't think we will ever come back to Delhi," when a small boy threw some red paint at another small boy, missed him, and hit me. The paint poured down me.

Premila nodded solemnly in answer, then added, "Your lipstick's smeared."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SPRING IN KASHMIR

THE DIARY I kept of the summer Premila and Mother and I spent in Kashmir was entitled romantically, *Journey into Limbo*. The reason which suggested the title is obscure, but in retrospect it does not seem inappropriate, for it conveys the timelessness of that summer.

On the route to Kashmir you can go by train only as far north as Rawalpindi. From there the journey has to be made in one of the cars on hire at Rawalpindi station. The stockily built Mohammedan driver of our battered Fiat, with his gaudy turban, knew he was a "character". He warned us before he left the station that he was always sick on this trip, but if we would let him stop the car every forty minutes or so, things could be managed very neatly.

All the way up to Srinagar he used one hand for steering and the other for holding the door on. While Premila, with remarkable imperviousness, slept through the entire journey, the driver talked to me about the good done by the Congress Party for the peasants and small shopkeepers in this part of the country. He

said too few people realized how far-reaching the influence of the Congress was in the princely States. Certainly there was a great deal of work still to be done, but while the British protected the Maharajas the people were bound to remain oppressed. I was surprised at his fluent use of political phraseology as he discussed representative government needed in the States which the Congress wanted, and hoped to institute in time, when the power of the Princes could be broken. We of British India, he said, under-estimated the force of the people themselves in the States.

When I asked him why he wasn't afraid to talk to us so freely, he became excited. "Tell the officials if you want to! Tell the Maharaja himself! We will fight them and the British. Wait and see, we'll fight!"

I asked him what he would fight the British with—guns? machines? I reminded him that we had not been allowed to produce armaments in the country.

"Machinery!" he said, and took his hand off the steering-wheel to dismiss the industrial age with a flourish. "If we have it, good. If not, still good."

"Then what will we fight with?"

He looked at me with scorn. "What we really need is to exploit our unity. If every Indian were to spit once, we could *drown* the British!"

Before we went up to Kashmir to find the spring that we had missed in the plains, I had imagined the country rather like an exaggerated Switzerland: mountains, snow and skiing, the Anglo-Indian Sports Club substituted for the Swiss ski huts. I had not expected the incredible squalor of the poorer Kashmiri sections of Srinagar, the State capital: that thin line of appalling houses along the river-banks, bleeding into the fields behind them and the river between them.

The English section of the city is confined to the upper part of the river Jhelum and to the small colonies of villas on the shores of the Dal Lake, which used to be the setting for the favourite summer palaces of the Mogul emperors in the more romantic days of Indian history. Of course the mountains were there as well. In those first days of early spring we could see the snows lurking behind the clouds like a guilty conscience, and in the Srinagar valley it was pleasantly cold and windy. But Kashmir wasn't clean and quaint, like Switzerland; the tremendous

shining mountains seemed to make the Srinagar slums more shocking and the poverty of the peasants more hopeless.

We hadn't planned to stay in Srinagar long. We wanted to climb into the Himalayas. On the train up we had asked Mother what people did in Kashmir, and she had told us that we could, if we wanted, ski at Gulmarg, but that that was what all the young subalterns did on their first leaves. We decided instead to go on a trek.

"Where shall we trek to?" I asked Premila as we pored over a map of Kashmir.

"Oh, Tibet," Premila said, and we marked in pencil the route we would follow.

After we had been in Srinagar for a couple of days we learned that the mountain passes were still unsafe for travel, because of the melting snows, so we were forced to stay in Srinagar for a few weeks. We decided to spend that time in a house-boat on one of the many canals between the Jhelum and the Dal Lake. It seemed to be the customary way to live in Kashmir—the Indian prototype of life in a trailer—and attractively unfamiliar as well. Originally the Kashmiris, who could not afford to live in the city and could not match even the low living standards of the agricultural worker, had taken to the migratory life of the house-boat. Sometimes they would moor their boats in one place long enough to raise a quick crop on the shore, and then travel on again, either living on the harvest or selling what they could. Nowadays, visitors to Kashmir, pleased with the novelty of river life, rent boats that are furnished luxuriously with Kashmiri carpets and brocades, chairs and tables often of hand-carved wooden filigree, and on the sun-deck beach furniture and striped awnings.

We were very comfortable in our house-boat until our party began to grow. First we were joined by some friends who planned to ride into the mountains about the time we were to leave, and who knew far more than we did about getting horses, guides, provisions and sun-helmets. Then Wallace Kirkland of *Life* Magazine came, and Phil Talbot, who was making a study of India for an American institute of world affairs, and a schoolmaster friend named Tim McMullen. The house-boat became too cramped for comfort. Brij Lal Nehru in the meantime had offered us the use of his house, so we accepted it belatedly and all of us moved in. Our problem was solved.

Premila and I wanted to see what we could of Srinagar while

we were there, so one day, to Mother's horror, we wandered off alone to the slums. Our route lay across the river from the Maharaja's old palace, and as we walked we were struck by the absence of written signs or advertisements. The shops had only pictures to represent their character, the streets were apparently unnamed. While we knew the people were illiterate, we were too used to advertisements not to miss them.

"I suppose it's no use teaching them to read," said Premila, "until you can give them a life in which literacy is valuable, if not vital."

"They need cleaning and housing more at the moment," I remarked. The dirt was overpowering.

"You should go to America," Premila said. "You seem to think that carbolic soap will cure anything."

In the worst section of the city, where the houses are built out over the river and supported on long, crooked poles, the exquisite Kashmir silver filigree is made. In tenements housing whole families in one unventilated room we found craftsmen who carved the wooden screens and furniture which are sold for fantastic prices to tourists in the English section of Srinagar. We fingered the sandalwood and ivory, the delicate embroidery on wool and silk, and were incredulous when told that ten cents a day is the most these workers can expect in wages.

Looking across the river to the old palace of the Maharaja of Kashmir we saw the gold-domed temple beside it. It was rumoured that the Maharaja had left this palace for the fabulous new one on the Dal Lake because he did not want his new bride to be disturbed by the sight of the slums from the palace windows. The gold temple, built originally for the use of the royal family, was now a show place for tourists. Most of the other temples in Kashmir have roofs made of beaten-out kerosene tins, which glitter with a fierce heat. In contrast, the wooden roofs of the slum houses around the temple have grass and flowers growing on them to keep the interiors damp and cool. In one of these houses we found a carpet-maker's workroom. This trade, like most Kashmiri trades, is handed down from father to son. It is a matter of family pride for a boy of eleven or twelve to produce almost as accurate work as his father. The carpet-maker we saw had acquired the fanciful name of Gannymede from some ancient mispronunciation of the Mohammedan name, Gani Ahmed. The extreme closeness of the work he had done all his life had made him blind. Certainly his sons, who sat in a row

before the enormous loom on which the carpet was being made, knew that they, too, would become blind in time. But they could not forsake their family trade.

Gannymede sat at one side of the room chanting the pattern which his sons were following. Even for this intricate design he needed no reference but his memory. He wore the traditional skull-cap and robe of the Kashmiri Moslem, and reposed cross-legged on the floor, fingering his long beard, and looking like a minor prophet. With tremendous dignity he recited the beautiful words of the carpet design: "Then the blue thread like the river Indus, flows through the green plains of the Punjab. It twists through the yellow deserts of the Sind, until it reaches the blue-green of the Arabian sea. It is the blue-green of the peacock's feather, shining with hidden gold. . . ."

"Poetry," Gannymede explained to us with condescension, "is in our blood. The Mohammedans are the true poets of India."

Premila was examining the completed section of the carpet. "Look!" she whispered. "This isn't an Indian pattern, is it?"

"It's something like Gobelin tapestry," I suggested.

Premila would not leave the workroom until we had asked the carpet-makers about it. They were a little puzzled.

Yes, there was some old story about people who had come here many years ago.

"Say the sixteenth century——" Premila interrupted.

This small community of strangers had wandered as far as India, had settled down in the valley, and had continued their crafts.

"But where did they come from?"

They were persecuted in their own country. It was far away.

"The Huguenots!" Premila said. "Could it have been France?"

"France?" said Gannymede, uninterested.

We left feeling that we had made some kind of a discovery, but feeling also a little foolish for making such a fuss about it. Gannymede, we thought, was right; he accepted people and circumstances with tolerant curiosity.

As we walked back through the hot alleys which smelled of food and latrines, we kept our eyes uncomfortably on the open drains in the narrow, unpaved roads. We were, as usual, surrounded by small, deformed children with sore eyes and pleading voices. "Miss Sahib, the Lord will bless you, may you have many children. I'm hungry, Miss Sahib, have mercy!" Premila was looking rather sick, but she persisted in peering into the dim

shops full of brightly coloured sweets, the owners asleep in the black caves of shadow behind. Wherever we went our curiosity and obviously new clothes brought the beggars crowding to us. By now we could look at their lice and festering boils with no sign of repulsion. We had even stopped nervously checking over our inoculations and immunities.

At last we reached the river again and walked carefully down the squelchy wooden steps to the water. There we hailed a *shikara*, the Kashmiri gondola, much as one hails a taxi, and started back home. The river is used as a main highway for traffic in Srinagar; it slows down the speed of living to a gentle, contemplative pace.

We showed Mother the things we had bought that day, and told her what we had paid for them, thinking the prices incredibly low. She looked amused. "That's probably about twice what you could have got them for."

"I don't care," I said crossly. "They certainly need the money more than we do."

"That," said Mother, "is what your grandmother would call unreasonable Western sentimentality."

But she tactfully changed the subject at once, and told us how she had spent the afternoon, with some Kashmiri friends. They had all gone to tea with the new Maharani of Kashmir.

While Mother was telling us all this she had summoned one of the servants. She told us to give the ayah all the clothes we had been wearing that day so that they could be boiled and disinfected.

"I know you two are silly about our Indian habits, but do remember not to go off into the slums again without a proper escort. And learn how to recognize lepers. They wander about the poorer parts of the city quite freely, and there is no point in taking unnecessary risks." She said all this in a carefully casual voice, though I could see she was worried at what she called our "irresponsibility". Before she left the room she added, "I don't think you need tell the others about your expedition. I doubt if there is much danger, and it will only upset them."

The next day Mother said that she would take us to the gardens of Shalimar and Nishat Bagh. To reach them you have to cross the Dal Lake by *shikara*, and on the way Mother, with her usual pleasant disregard for accuracy, began to tell us the story of the famous gardens. Nishat Bagh was built by the emperor Jehangir for Nur Jahan, whom he had long loved, since the day

he first met her. She had been then the old Queen's handmaid, and Jehangir, intent on the hawk he was training, suddenly gave her two pigeons to hold. By mistake she let one pigeon escape. When Jehangir returned, he was furious at her carelessness. "How could you do such a thing?" he cried. "Like this," she answered, releasing the other pigeon. The legend maintains that he forgot the pigeons, but remembered the charm of Nur Jahan's smile. Her brother, who was the governor of Kashmir, had built Shalimar for himself. Jehangir, in jealousy of its beauty, then built Nishat Bagh, but even after it was finished Nur Jahan still thought Shalimar more lovely. From this rivalry over gardens grew a hatred so great that it led to conspiracy, and eventually to the murder of Nur Jahan's brother.

Whenever I think of Shalimar now I do not remember it for its starlit loneliness and romantic splendour, but I see it instead as it was on a certain festival day, alive with Kashmiri holiday-makers in their pathetically bright clothes of shiny Japanese satin, curiously silent for an Indian crowd. They sat abstracted in brilliant groups of pink and orange on the lawns and near the severe flower-beds, or wandered slowly past the fountains and through the pavilions, with their eyes on the mountains. They stared at the jade and carnelian mosaics in the marble walls of the summer-houses—the pride of the Mogul architects for a trick of construction which makes the buildings appear to be floating on the water of the artificial pools. The children surreptitiously threw pebbles into the clear spring water of the ponds and water-falls. They were not, of course, allowed to drink that water.

Under the trees families gathered to eat their picnic meals. The mother would carefully divide the big *chapati* and the handful of peas among the rest; afterwards there would be a special treat of tiny pieces of *halva* from one of the vendors in Shalimar. These people seemed to feel no resentment at the contrast between their way of life and the life which Shalimar—an emperor's whim—represented. When the official gardeners called out that it was closing time, and made a thorough search of the far corners to make sure that no slum-dweller had remained to spend the night there, the crowds filed out of the main gate without looking back at the darkening garden. The children dragged on their mothers' hands, bored and unhappy.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOUSE-BOAT ON THE JHELUM

WHEN WE could be reasonably certain that spring had really come, and that the passes were clear, we completed our preparations for the trek into the mountains. Premila was the only one of us who had any regret at leaving Srinagar, because she had to give away the apple tree which she had rented for the season. We decided to go by river, in the house-boat, as far as Ganderbal, which is about twelve miles up the valley.

While we moved slowly along the canal to the main river we watched the old women peddling vegetables from boat to boat, and the horse-drawn *tongas* jingling their way along the banks. We passed the genteel and somehow provincial section up the river where the English officials on holiday lived, and came again into the noisy and filthy, but gay, Kashmiri part of the river. Small, naked children were bathing in a drift of that morning's garbage, and the women were washing clothes, beating them out on the quay-stones and spreading them to dry in the pale, early morning sun.

The boatmen walked up and down the ledge which went around the house-boat, punting it upstream. As they put their poles into the water, the leader sang a refrain which each man repeated down the boat in order to keep time with the man on the other side. Sometimes they sang just a phrase, "Well done, young braves!" or, "The grace of a good body is beyond comparison." Sometimes the leader chanted a few lines from a love song:

> Come to me softly, oh my beloved,
> And I will colour your nails,
> I will put henna on your finger-tips.
> Rejoice,
> For my love will be like a wreath of flowers.

They were traditional songs, but the head boatman admitted that he added flourishes of his own when he felt inclined.

Leaving the outskirts of Srinagar, we had our first clear view of the Sind valley. It was startlingly wide, flat, surrounded by the snows, and the mountains seemed all at once to be nearer. There were sudden bursts of mustard-fields in flower, and great expanses of iris in washes of purple and white. The boat was moving at a slow walking rate, so I jumped across to the bank to collect some

flowers. When I came back on board with an armful of iris for Mother, the boatman seized them and threw them into the river. I was too surprised to say anything before he explained that many of the fields of iris we had seen were really graveyards. Since the flower is planted only on graves, it has become a symbol of ill-omen. If it is ever found in a garden it is pulled up instantly and thrown away. The reason originally was that the poor people who could afford only shallow graves and tiny tombstones, planted tough-rooted iris on their family graves to prevent animals from digging them up. The Mohammedans, who believe in the resurrection of the body, are exceedingly careful that a grave shall not be disturbed.

One of our boatmen had been married a few days earlier, and, being reluctant to leave his wife so soon, he had tied a small boat to the rear of the boatmen's larger craft to accommodate his wife and mother. He wanted me to take a photograph of them, but the girl was much too shy. When I approached she crouched over the bowl of rice she was sifting and covered her face with her hands. She was wearing, as most Kashmiri women do, a great deal of heavy jewellery round her ankles and in her ears. All her wedding presents had been in the form of jewellery, for a Kashmiri woman has no legal right to her husband's property or money, and must keep her own security in silver or gold. Mother whispered to me that this was the kind of thing she and her friends were trying to change, but without legal power they were helpless.

On our insistence, the Kashmiri girl showed us that her long, shapeless robe was wide enough for her to keep a charcoal-burner under it in the cold winter months. She confided to Mother that she had taken her first bath a few days before, when she was married. Her mother-in-law pointed out with pride the long lobes to the bride's ears, a sign of great beauty in Kashmir. Her own lobes reached almost to her shoulders; she had worn heavy silver earrings since childhood. In other parts of India long and beautifully shaped ears are a matter for great pride, but as far as we knew only in Kashmir did they feel that abnormally long ear-lobes were attractive.

When next day we reached Ganderbal, a very small village, we left the house-boat with some regret. It had provided the most satisfying and leisurely method of travel that any of us had known. While the pack coolies were putting up the tents, we wandered down to the village itself.

Along the mud paths through the fields, the infinitely lonely sound of cowbells drifted towards Ganderbal. On the main and only road of the village a crowd of children and men gathered to hear the story-teller who was passing through, while in the small mud-and-thatched huts the women finished their evening meal.

We joined the crowd as unobtrusively as possible just as the story-teller was reciting one of India's famous legends. The audience knew the story well; to most of the people it was as familiar as the sacred songs hummed to them when they were children. These legends and songs were part of the oral cultural tradition of Indian villages. Yet they watched the story-teller's gestures and listened to his changing voice with alert interest, ready to correct any inaccuracy. The children enjoyed the farce, which was second on the programme, more than the legend, because they could act the parts of the various animals in the story.

After the show the audience noticed us for the first time, and dispersed quickly. Some of the children stayed behind to stare, but most of them returned with their fathers to the village huts. We went back to our camp, the cluster of tents on the river-bank about a mile outside the village, because it was apparent that strangers were not popular. We sat around the bonfire the guides had started on the sandy bank and ate our evening meal watching the smoky glow from the village across the river.

When we walked through Ganderbal the next day, the village was already deserted. Only the people too old to work were left, to take care of the infants. By this contact with the members of its grandparents' generation, an Indian child acquires a heritage which we who knew our grandparents only as acquaintances can envy. The adults working in the fields returned to the village for their midday meal, and again after dark.

Mother asked Premila and me to find somebody in the village who would make for her the Punjabi women's costume of trousers wrinkled tightly at the ankle and worn with a long tunic. As far as I know, it was the first time Mother had proposed wearing anything but a sari. She had occasionally found a sari inconvenient or conspicuous, but only when she had to ride horseback did she admit that it was impossible. Premila and I found an old woman in the village who told us, with what seemed like bad temper, but was probably only timidity, that she would see that the job was done by the village women. When she took the material neither of us had the courage to ask her for a receipt or guarantee

of any kind. Although we tried to talk to her, we found her even less communicative than Gannymede had been.

When Mother's clothes were ready, one of the village boys brought them down to us, and we were reminded that we had set no price for the tailoring. Mother, however, made a successful bargain. With this small job accomplished, we were ready to start on our trek into the mountains.

The three of us walked into Ganderbal for the last time that evening, and stood watching the women in their odd, loose clothes pounding grain in stone vessels, their long, muddy braids swinging with the movement of their bodies. They were as foreign to Premila and me as they had been on our first evening; they had spoken to neither of us, and seemed deliberately to avoid any sort of communication. But Mother slid easily into conversation with one of them, and in the exchange of gossip told her that we were leaving Ganderbal the next day. The woman nodded. Yes, she knew all about our plans. The news had reached them earlier that day through the pack coolies. Premila and I were surprised; the villagers, it seemed, were not as indifferent to our movements as we had thought. Before we returned to camp, some of the women came up to Mother with a going-away present of lotus honey.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TREK INTO TIBET

THE DAY we started for Sonemarg was bleakly cloudy and there was a hint of snow in the air. Our pack-train consisted of a pony for each of us and four ponies to carry our camping equipment. The guides and grooms walked most of the way, and climbed on the pack-ponies only when the path was too narrow for them to walk beside the animals. Premila and I rode in slacks, shirts, open Kashmir sandals and sun topees, but Mother was the only one who, in her Punjab clothes, looked really appropriate in our haphazard pack-train and against a background of Kashmiri mountains.

The guides muttered about a blizzard, but we took no notice of them, and they didn't insist. Late that afternoon the massing clouds did bring a blizzard searing down the valley from the snows. We camped at once outside a tiny Kashmiri village—no

more than a cluster of huts. In the morning, the villagers, with realistic consideration, brought us tea, made in a samovar, heavily spiced with cloves and saffron, and sweetened with honey. Their houses, we now had time to notice, were built into the side of a mountain, and as usual had grass and flowers growing on the roofs. From above, a Kashmiri village is entirely invisible.

To Wallace Kirkland's delight, a few hours after we had started we met the British Resident of Kashmir on his way back from the tour of inspection which he undertakes once a year. His pack-train, although he was travelling with only a couple of officials, was far longer than ours. In contrast to our fifteen for eleven people, he had about twenty-five ponies, one of which was carrying an enormous tin bathtub. He would not let Kirkland take photographs of his bathtub for publication in *Life* Magazine.

By the time we had been travelling three days, the rest of the world had become remote and unreal. Even Kirkland and Phil, who had never before been so long without seeing a newspaper, felt it and shared our detachment from the happenings in Europe.

The people we met on the way were a constant source of diversion. I remember how indignant Kirkland was when he gave a half-finished can of peaches to some Tibetans we overtook, only to have them thank him, throw the peaches away, and carefully preserve the can. Most of the Tibetan traders we met travelling down to Srinagar asked for matches. They seemed to think this was the only worth-while device that the West had to offer. We bought some of their heavy silver and turquoise jewellery and paid them with whatever they fancied of our possessions. They wore Russian-looking robes with wide sleeves, and shoes made of sacking and tied with rope. They were always accompanied by their wives, but as soon as the women caught sight of us they pulled down their veils, and we could see only their slanting Mongolian eyes, full of amusement and curiosity. The language they used, chatting softly among themselves, bore more resemblance to Russian than to Hindustani. We must have seemed absurd to them, with our loud voices and impractical, unfeminine clothes.

Our guides told us that the blizzard we had encountered had been part of a really serious one that had cut Sonemarg off from the higher reaches of the Tibet road for more than a week. This time we paid more attention to them, and camped outside Thajiwas, another tiny Kashmiri village just below the snow-line.

Premila and I woke the first morning to blue shadows across the snow and the sound of Kirkland's voice raised in inadequate argument with one of the villagers. The man had heard of our arrival and had come to sell us the inevitable Kashmiri spinach. He had found Kirkland eating canned crab for breakfast. On being asked to explain what it was, Kirkland had said that it was an animal that lived in the sea.

"Sea?" said the villager. "What is 'sea'?"

Premila went out to help with the explanation. "It's an enormous expanse of water—that is, salt water," she said. "It's so big that you can't see across it," she added, a little desperately.

The man smiled unbelievingly.

"What can you do?" asked Kirkland in despair. "The guy obviously doesn't believe you, yet he won't stand up and say you're wrong!"

Premila sounded sour. "That's probably because people like him have been bullied too long by people like us, and by now they know better than to contradict." She turned to the man and continued, "This water separates the countries of the world. It is wider than the Jhelum."

"Miss Sahib must be right," said the villager. But he knew that beyond his mountains there was nothing at all.

Later that morning one of the guides came back from Thajiwas with another villager. They were looking solemn, and told us that we would have to stay in Thajiwas until the passes cleared. It might be days, they said, but more probably it would be weeks before we could continue our journey to Sonemarg. We decided to take a chance on the weather's clearing rather than return to the valley and try another route.

This settled, the old villager came up to me. "I am told," he said apologetically, "by my son, who is a wild boy and picks up these rumours from Srinagar, that the foreigners are killing each other." The "foreigners" is the standard Kashmiri term for the English. "Is this happening in their own land, or in ours? If, indeed, it is happening at all. I am interested," he went on, "because my daughter is to be married to a man from the next village, who will travel south to find wealth. I do not wish her to be exposed to the dangers of the country in which there is fighting."

I assured him that the foreigners were not fighting near Kashmir yet, and that the Second World War would not interfere with his daughter's wedding. Did he object to his daughter's leaving the village for the unfamiliar life of the city? I asked him. He

said no, that ten years ago he would have forbidden it, but now it was the spirit of the times, and since the old people could not hold back change, they might as well accept it. I thought of my grandmother and her autocratic refusal to accept the new ways, and wondered if she would not be a more secure person if she shared this villager's point of view. She was weak because of her need to surround herself artificially with the standards of her girlhood.

I was struck by the fact that these villagers were curious about us rather than suspicious. The Ganderbal villagers, in contrast, knew enough of the city to have lost their curiosity, and to have gained suspicion without understanding.

When the villager left me, Mother remarked that I seemed to be getting along with the peasants of Thajiwas better than I had with those at Ganderbal. I told her that I had only answered their questions, we had not really found any common ground.

"It takes time," she said. "You still have too many superficial Western traits to inspire much confidence here. They can deal with the West in small doses—such as they would get in Srinagar —but not with the complete product."

"But that can't be a good thing," I objected. "Surely they shouldn't *have* to adapt to the West. Why can't they just adapt to modern India?"

Mother laughed. "Don't worry, if Indians can convert kerosene tins into temple roofs, they can certainly modify the West as much as the West modifies them."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GOOD-BYE TO KASHMIR

IT WAS on an inexplicable wave of unrest that we all left Thajiwas after a few weeks to return to Srinagar, instead of making the last stage of the journey into Tibet.

Kirkland was waiting for further instructions from *Life* Magazine. Phil felt that he was wasting time. Most of the day he spent lying in the shade with junket all over his face to take the sting out of his pink and peeling sunburn. He had already learned a fair amount of Hindustani, and although his language was too literary for fluent conversation with the villagers, he could make himself understood. He was far in advance of Tim, who, after a

year in India, could manage only a couple of simple phrases. As for Kirkland, he had learned one phrase, which, accompanied by waving hands and the firm conviction that if he said a thing loudly enough and often enough the other fellow was bound to understand, always obtained for him anything he wanted. His phrase was "*Ek anna, ek tasvir*", or "one cent for each photograph". The villagers were always won over by this astonishing piece of practicality—one cent would be a substantial part of their week's earnings. But there was nothing more now that he wanted to photograph. The holidays suddenly seemed very short, and the discomforts of camping absurdly large.

We reached Srinagar in far less time than it had taken us to make the journey up. On our arrival Kirkland found no instructions for him at the Srinagar post office and sent, with some irritation, a cable to his editor: "Greetings from India. Guess who." He claimed that the reply he received said: "Shirley Temple?" but he never showed us the message.

Gradually the members of our party left Kashmir and scattered. The weeks in the mountains receded to a great distance, growing more incredible by the minute. Surely *we* couldn't have lived in tents so long without a proper bath in a tub. How had we managed to exist on spinach and canned soup? Why hadn't we worried perpetually about the war? France had fallen, the war in Europe seemed nearly lost, and we had neither known nor missed the knowledge. We thought of our casual little summer vacation as one thinks of the travels of Marco Polo—unreal, fantastic, to an unknown land. We were all aware of the disquieting contrast and were uncomfortably over-emphatic about our delight at being back in "civilization". The isolation of the Kashmiri villagers became all at once comprehensible and even enviable. If we could so easily detach ourselves from world events, or even from Indian events, what could we expect of the villagers who had never had a chance—for lack of leisure and communication facilities—to develop political consciousness?

For the few days that we spent in Srinagar we stayed again with the Brij Lal Nehrus. Now that it was later in the summer the "season" in Srinagar was well under way. We went to several parties, and were conspicuously not invited to a reception given by old friends of Mother's family. Because, a quarter of a century earlier, Mother had broken Kashmiri social tradition by marrying out of the community, she was still not accepted by the orthodox Kashmiri hostesses.

Premila and I attended a dance one evening at the Srinagar sports club, and came away wiser but disheartened. These dances are open to everybody, though the membership of the club is not. The Indians who go there usually leave with their own peculiar snobbishness intensified, and with stronger feelings of both scorn and exasperation. It is not a gay place. The main room and the terrace are always decorated with fairy lights, which are left up, dusty and rather pathetic, during the week, to be lit only on Saturday nights. The women wear full-skirted taffeta dresses in pastel colours with adaptable necklines, and jackets which can transform *décolleté* dresses into dinner dresses. The men wear the inevitable tropical dinner clothes, and keep a nervous finger under collars turning limp with perspiration. Only the members of the orchestra look comfortable, in their loose white clothes, as they beat out carefully American jazz rhythms, their flat Goan faces tense with concentration. Women who have met each other only that morning at the one hairdresser in Srinagar will greet each other with surprise and delight. Occasionally some one who has just come out to India or has just returned from a holiday in England will hold a transitory court, while her friends memorize the details of her clothes and take mental notes of the new styles which their *darzis* will copy. It is Kipling's Anglo-India. The British do not admit the incongruities, and the Indians, trying to copy something which appears to succeed, will not admit the incongruities.

It was too hot to dance the evening we were there. The music was painfully exact in its measures, and a sari is not designed for travelling backwards across a dance floor. Premila and I left early.

Premila was silent and depressed on the way home. That night, as she sat up in bed braiding her hair, she said, "The British aren't really like that, are they? We can't have changed so much in one year."

"I don't think it's the British," I suggested. "I think it's India that does this to them. I suppose if they kept their eyes open or in any way felt themselves a part of India they wouldn't be able to stay here as conquerors, governors, traders or anything else in the present set-up."

"I wonder if they realize how much they're missing." Premila paused. "There's so much to India," she said—"so much that, if you aren't careful, you flounder. You look for quick solutions, person or social. I don't think the remedies work except on limited and specific layers. Before I saw all this—Kashmir, I

mean—I thought Kitty's solution was perfect. And of course, if you are prepared not to be a part of these villagers—as people or as a problem or even as a concept—it *is* perfect. But then you would be incompletely Indian."

"I know; but what alternative have we? We *aren't* a part of these people, and I don't know of any kind of life that can make the bridge."

"You mean, if you *do* affiliate with them you lose Kitty's kind of life."

"Exactly," I said. "You're bound to be incompletely Indian unless somehow you can be part of both layers."

"Well, yes. I suppose that's the heart of the matter."

Then Premila said, "I wonder if there is a solution," just as I said, "I wonder what the solution is."

We both laughed. By our way of expressing ourselves we had summed up neatly what we decided was the difference between us.

The following afternoon our hosts, the Nehrus, gave a reception in honour of their cousin, Jawaharlal Nehru. It was a garden-party held on their lawn, and a characteristically Indian affair. The guests sat in the shade of awnings stretched between the trees, and talked as usual about politics as the servants passed around the sticky Indian sweets, Kashmiri tea, sherbets and small savouries.

Among the guests at this party I noticed for the first time the more delightful products of a combined Indian and European culture. When the blend is successful the over-emotionalism of the Indian is tempered with detachment; the rigid self-consciousness of the British is softened by the Indian sense of fantasy and a highly metaphorical use of language. Most of the conversation was in English, liberally decorated with phrases from Hindustani or even Sanskrit. I don't know why I was surprised that English loses none of its essential character—imagination and precision—from being spoken with an accent by people who use it to assert themselves against the very ones who forced the language upon them in the first place.

Premila and I sat and listened for what seemed like hours to theories about what the Congress Party should do next. As at all such gatherings, there was the usual group of polite revolutionaries who felt that any means were justified that would rid India of the British.

We saw Nehru come in the drive-way. As soon as he had greeted his hosts he was surrounded by a mob of guests asking

him questions, demanding his opinions. He had arrived in an ordinary *tonga*, unescorted. His clothes were the simple nationalist "uniform" of handspun and hand-woven cotton, with a white Gandhi cap. He had just returned from a tour of the Kashmiri villages—this was his home State—and he told the party what he had seen and some of the conclusions he had reached. Before he left Srinagar he had received a tremendous and spontaneous welcome from the people of Kashmir, which had been described to us by several people, including the driver of the car from Rawalpindi station. There had been a long procession through the city streets, and decorated *shikaras* had followed his boat down the river as admirers threw flowers and garlands on the water.

Everybody remarked on Nehru's youthful gaiety, on the change from the tired politician they knew with the steady, thoughtful voice. He admitted that he felt happier and reassured because the ease with which he had communicated with the villagers proved his real affinity with the remotest people of India. Apparently they had grasped immediately the issues of which he spoke. The job in the villages, he said, was one of disseminating information rather than extensive political education. Social consciousness came readily when people were given facts. The trouble was that Indian peasants did not have access to the usual media of propaganda—radios, newspapers, books. They had to rely upon the occasional visitor from the outside to bring them the information they needed before they could participate in their government. It was from these people, Nehru maintained, that representative government in India would draw its strength: the peasants who, although they are illiterate, are not uneducated, for they have thousands of years of Indian history and culture in their blood.

Seeing Nehru for a moment alone, Premila and I crossed the room to speak with him. He twitted us about Mother, who, as usual, was the centre of a crowd.

"I don't know," he said, "how you two dare come to the same parties with her. It must be very discouraging for you."

Then he went on to talk about his daughter Indira—Indu—who had been at college in England at the same time as Premila. He was so animated and eager that he looked once more like the young man I remembered seeing years before when Premila and I used to walk down the road from Mother's home in Allahabad to play with the Nehru and Sapru children. These families, which had been driven out of Kashmir hundreds of years earlier

by the Moslem invasions and had settled farther south, still considered Kashmir their home and Allahabad the city of their exile.

It was late before the guests went home. From the windows we could see them drive away in their *tongas*, past the house-boats of the Europeans on the canal. Through the lighted openings of the boats we could see the English people finishing their dinner, dressed in evening clothes for the club afterwards. The Indians do not dine until the heat of the day is past.

Over the bridge and up the drive to the front door came the brisk little brown figure of a telegraph boy on his bicycle, pedalling furiously. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and leaned against a pillar of the veranda while he waited for someone to come to the door.

The tropical nightfall is deceptive. Twilight gives the effect of lasting only a few minutes, and visitors from England tell each other that they miss the long, grey evenings of London. But although the darkness seems to rush down from the mountains, night takes longer than you think. If you look up at the snows you can see the fury of crimson and purple lingering behind the horizon. Standing impatient and abstracted on the veranda, the telegraph boy was caught for a moment in a strange half-lit beauty. I could hear the mysterious evening life of the garden and the tapping of the boy's foot against the stone step, when the bearer answered the door.

A telegram for Mother. There was a flurry of footsteps on the stairs, a slam of a door, and then Mother's "nothing-to-be-worried-about" voice from another room.

"You'd better be packing, darlings; we're going back to Bombay. Apparently your grandfather is ill."

Clearly something serious was the matter, because Mother was being so carefully casual that she had not even come into our room to tell us about the telegram.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TOURISTS IN DEHLI

ON THE train from Rawalpindi to Delhi I tried to sort out my impressions of India. We had heard definitely by now that we could not return to England; apart from the problem of transportation, Mother had insisted, an unnecessary person to feed

would be most unwelcome in London. I was not as disappointed as I would have been a few months earlier. India was perhaps less congenial than England had been, but to me, at least, infinitely more interesting. I had not reached anything like an understanding of India, but my curiosity and a wish to resolve a personal problem would have left me feeling unsatisfied and a little guilty if I had taken an opportunity to return to England then.

Of a few things I was reasonably certain—elementary enough to the "real" Indians, but important discoveries to me. The first of these was that India was not a fairy-tale country filled with rajahs wearing flashy jewellery. It was a country eminently worth exploring simply because it is exactly the reverse—a country filled for the most part with people who live so close to the necessities of existence that only important things are important to them. The country was beginning to live in my mind because I was learning about it from people and not from textbooks and teachers. The people who were teaching me were fairly inarticulate; to a limited degree Mother could act as an interpreter and guide, but I was actually learning far more from the servants, the railway porters, the Kashmiri carpet-workers than from her.

This India, in common with every other part of the world, was changing. Everything was in process, and into this movement the individual Indian had to find his place. We were on our way back to my grandmother's home in Bombay, and for a short time at least we would again live in that strange, out-dated island of life which she preserved around her. When we had first arrived she had represented for me all that was Indian, but now for the first time I was beginning to see that she was as much a stranger to her changing country as I was. The speed had been too rapid for her; in an effort to preserve the security of her childhood she could only cling rigidly to the old conventions and the framework of a dying society.

My immediate job—Premila's too, though she seemed to consider it no problem—was to find just where we fitted into the new India, what we had in common with the students and political workers we had known in Delhi, and the peasants and slum-dwellers of Kashmir. I knew we could not feel ourselves to be "real" Indians until we knew the kind of affinity of which Nehru had spoken—with all Indians.

My third discovery, which impressed me more than any of the others, was that in spite of the superficial differences of dress and custom, Indians are solidly united by reason of their nationality.

Because the immediate manifestation of this unity is not political, it is apt to appear insignificant in the minds of many tourists and foreigners. I felt reasonably certain that if the barriers of distance and physical communication could be broken down, India would be a nation, not a series of disassociated States. This, I thought, answered the question which Andy Miller, the Bombay newspaperman, had asked: Can India be considered a country in the sense with which we are familiar? As one bit of specific evidence —the bearer whom we had taken from Delhi to Srinagar had got on so well with the Kashmiris that he decided to stay in Srinagar after we left. He might, he said, join us in Bombay when we knew our plans. Here was an example of an Indian at home anywhere in his country.

Then I came to the business of deciding where I fitted in and what I wanted to do in India. Kitty's way of life, which meant an uncompromising acceptance of all things Indian, still did not seem entirely satisfactory for me. It would appear too much like an admission that the ten years I had spent out of India were a complete loss. I didn't think they were, and I didn't want to act as if they were. I wanted to be a "real" Indian, but I wanted to be a "real" Indian with a European up-bringing.

We had the train compartment to ourselves. It was the usual spacious and dusty carriage of all Indian trains. The first-class carriages accommodate four people, have a bathroom for each compartment and air-conditioning on some trains. The second-class carriages have a bathroom for every six berths and no air-conditioning. The intermediate class and third-class carriages have long, hard benches instead of berths, and one bathroom for as many people as can squeeze into each carriage. Usually we travelled with servants; they would ride in the third-class carriage, and when the train stopped at a station one of them would come hurrying into our compartment with the appropriate meal, or with just a glass of orange-juice or a cup of tea. Where they cooked these meals, and how they kept them hot in spite of train delays, I never found out.

As the train stopped at a station Premila sat up on her berth, put down her paper-backed book and announced that we really should have persuaded the bearer to come with us on this trip; she was starving. It was a remark she would never have made a year before, but we were both growing accustomed to being waited on, we were no longer embarrassed by the discomfort to which Indians put their servants. Premila leaned out of the

window, and was immediately surrounded by vendors holding up Indian savouries still sizzling from the heat of their charcoal-burners, by women with baskets of painted toys, with kites, with garlands, with sweets, with ice-cream, with clusters of jasmin, with wooden models of Hindu gods, with pottery bowls of curds, by beggars with whining, monotonous voices, and by children offering to perform acrobatic tricks. We had learned that we shouldn't trust the purity of station platform food, so Premila chose a dozen tangerines, after examining them to see that the skins were unbroken, and three cocoanuts. She bargained for them in fairly fluent Hindustani, flipped a few annas to the vendors and settled back again.

Mother smiled, "I see that some of the rough edges are being rubbed off."

Premila looked up at me, "What are you staring into the middle distance about?"

"I was just wondering what we were going to do in Bombay."

"Visit Grandfather and stay for a while, I suppose."

"Are we going to college or anything?"

"Would you like to?" Mother asked.

"I don't know," I answered. "I'd like to look around first, I think. I do feel awfully uneducated. I thought perhaps if I went to college here I might be able to understand Indians a little better. I've been wondering about spending the rest of my life here, and I was feeling a little lost."

Mother came over to me, laughing. "My poor darling! It isn't anything to do with education. You'll find when you visit the Bombay College that it probably doesn't have the kind of curriculum you would want. They will probably duplicate much of the work you did at St. Paul's, and certainly won't provide anything comparable to Oxford or Cambridge. Feeling at home here and, as you put it, understanding Indians is mostly, I think, a matter of having something to contribute to Indian life—something, that is, that Indians want—and of having or acquiring the technique of contributing it."

Something to contribute? Perhaps that was the answer. I said, "But Europe seems to have no place here—it couldn't be less wanted. I mean Indian cities have acquired a good many of the physical characteristics of Europe, but it's an awfully superficial coating really. As you once said, it's like using kerosene tins for temple roofs—more convenient, quicker, but not really a sign that they have assimilated Western life. Well, we're Europeans

in too many ways. I don't know what we have that Indians would want."

"Don't make the mistake of assuming we have nothing to learn from the West," said Mother seriously, and added, "But don't think that we are going to take over everything Western either."

"Look at Kitty," I said. "She gave up the West completely and seems to be making a very good go of it, but I don't think that I could do it, or would want to."

"Kitty *is* contributing, though, the experience and ability she has in psychiatry and education—all learned in Europe."

"I suppose so. Still, I don't have anything like that I could work with."

Mother laughed again. "Well, don't worry about it, darling; you'll have plenty of time to find out."

"I think," said Premila, "that you make far too much fuss about it all. If you didn't always have to be *doing* something, but could be yourself with people, I don't think there would be any problems."

And for Premila that was exactly how things seemed to work. She had Mother's happy faculty for surrounding herself with congenial people wherever she happened to be. Her friends could belong equally well to England, to India, or to any other country, and the people outside her circle weren't altogether real to her. All she had to do in Bombay was find pleasant work of some kind. Friends presented no problem to her. I think she would have liked to understand the Indian people as well, but it wasn't a necessity for living in the country. Or perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps that was the way to understand the people and the country, by making a few close friends. But I rejected the possibility.

We arrived in Delhi the next morning in the blinding heat of early September. Our plan was to pick up our luggage there and stay in Delhi overnight, before we left for Bombay. Premila and I had been travelling in slacks, but Mother said that we could not arrive in Bombay wearing them. It was all right in north India, where people were used to seeing their women in trousers —the Turkish trousers, tunic and veil are the common dress— but in Bombay we must wear saris again. Of course, slacks were preferable to dresses, because nowhere in India is it entirely decent among orthodox families for girls to expose their legs.

These were the last days of the monsoon, and in the long waits between the rains the heat was moist and intense. We stopped at

Kitty's house long enough to collect our bags and unpack saris to wear on the train to Bombay. They were uncreased and ready to be worn immediately, although they had been packed for five months. Thirty saris will fit easily into a medium-sized bag, because their six straight yards of silk or georgette pack as flat as sheets, so we had not much luggage.

Mother in the meantime had called up a friend of hers who had stayed in Delhi through the hot weather to ask if he could put up with three dinner guests, as it was too hot to eat at a hotel or restaurant. Such a request is not an imposition in Delhi, because the inconvenience to the host, unless he has made other plans, is negligible and the servants are used to providing meals on short notice. The friend sent his car in for us, and we drove over the glaring, dusty roads into Old Delhi, where we found him sitting in the garden with an ice-pack on his head. He politely offered us ice-packs too, but they melted too quickly to be comfortable.

"The worst of it is," he said, "that the weather bureau says it won't rain all night. That means another intolerable night. I'll have to bay at the moon like all the other old dogs around here."

"Full moon?" Premila asked idly.

"I believe so."

Mother asked suddenly, "What's the time?"

"About five. Why? Forget an appointment?"

"No. It just occurred to me that this would be the perfect night to see the Taj Mahal by moonlight. The girls have never seen it."

"That would be a wonderful thing to do," our host said. "You certainly are not going to be able to get any sleep in Delhi, so you might as well spend the night driving to Agra."

Premila and I agreed. Premila said that as long as we weren't truly anything else, we might at least be genuine tourists.

"Won't you join us?" Mother asked our host.

"I wish I could, but I have to be at work before you could get back tomorrow. But I tell you what I *will* do. I'll send you off with my chauffeur in the car, then you won't have to tire your eyes by night driving on these unlit roads."

He called his bearer, gave the orders about the car and instructions for the cook to prepare a picnic dinner for us to take with us. We started about half an hour later, reached Agra late that night, and drove straight to the Taj Mahal.

There were almost no tourists there, for it was the wrong season and the weather was unpredictable. We walked among the ghostly

pools and gardens and stared at the Taj, luminous and too much like the soapstone model of it which we had in the drawing-room when I was five years old to be particularly surprising. As our eyes became used to the light we saw the dim, still reflection in the pools. In the drifts of shadow under the platform on which the Taj stands some of the official guides were asleep. In the dark parts of the gardens families were snatching a few hours of rest before the guards found them and turned them out.

We wandered alone into the tomb itself. We could just pick out the jade and carnelian mosaics, and the marble lace of the windows was black against the sky. The floor was cold to our feet.

Premila suddenly whispered, "Let's go away, quickly——"

Mother and I both caught her feeling of fright, and followed her out and down the steps. At the entrance we turned and looked back at the Taj Mahal. There it was, distant and familiar. We all laughed a little nervously at our flare of panic.

The next morning when we came down to breakfast in the Agra Hotel, the only other people in the dining-room were two young princesses of a small State in eastern India, seated at the table next to ours. We had known them as rather solemn children when they came to Paris for periodic vacations, and had not seen them since. They were painfully embarrassed upon recognizing us, but invited us over to their table, explaining that they were in Agra for a short holiday with an A.D.C. and equerry and their cousin as a chaperone. They hadn't expected to see anyone they knew.

Mother suggested that this was a rather strange time of year to take a holiday in Agra. They looked evasive. Yes, it was a little hot.

Premila laughed. "Only a hundred and twenty in the shade!"

The younger one said in a burst of confidence, "You see, we can only take our vacations in an off season, otherwise we meet people we know." Noticing our surprise, she added, "I mean, if we were to go to the hills now we would have to behave exactly as we would in the State, because there would be so many people to carry tales about us home. But if we come to Agra in the middle of the summer we aren't likely to meet friends, and can wear what we like"—she looked sadly down at her slacks—"and go about unattended, and act the way we used to in Europe."

"I never realized it was such a constricted life in a State," I said.

The younger girl ignored the warning glances of her sister and

looked at me wide-eyed and pathetic. "Oh yes. At home we have to be what the people expect any member of the ruling family to be, correct in a thoroughly orthodox way."

Her sister spoke suddenly. "It's nothing like Paris there. No parties, except the palace receptions, no dates, no riding and dancing and gaiety. Of course, we do get down to Bombay for a while every winter, but that isn't quite the same thing, because the retinue comes with us, and somehow it's not as good as sneaking off alone like this."

I had always thought of a princess' life as something glamorous and delightful, with no worries and few responsibilities. I thought that it would be immense fun to wear their beautiful jewellery and gold-and-silver-tissue saris. They told me that the jewellery all belonged to the State and when they wore it they felt a little like the people who wear for a few hours the pearls that are kept in safe deposit boxes in banks, so that the necklaces will keep their lustre.

"Can't you *do* anything about it?" I asked. "Can't you get away and do what you want if you feel like it? The life might not be as comfortable as life in the State, but at least you would be doing what you want."

"Goodness, we couldn't do that," said the elder, shocked and rather wistful. "What would we work at? All the education we've had has been from the palace tutors, who taught us etiquette, and a French finishing school, which taught us how to find a husband—and we aren't even allowed to do that." She smiled.

"Could you do that?" Premila asked. "I mean, could you let someone else pick your husband for you?"

After all, these girls were not like Asha; they had spent much of their lives in Europe.

"We don't really have much choice. We never get to meet any men on our own—except those of whom the State approves. Within that small group we can pick and choose more or less as we please—unless, of course, there is some tradition that requires the princess of one State to marry a prince of another. Then there is nothing for it."

Their lives, their position could only be justified by tradition, by present power artificially supplied by British armies pledged by treaty to support their rule at a time when their rule, in fact their presence and social position, were obsolete.

Mother thought she was tactfully changing the subject when

she asked after their older sister. Both girls looked embarrassed. Their sister was in England, they told us finally, but they hadn't heard from her for some time. She had found life in the State impossible after her European education, and had returned to France. Didn't the State still look after her? we asked. Apparently not, because she had thrown over all their rules of conduct, and they had rather lost touch with her.

"But what is she doing? Do you know at least that she's safe?"

"Yes, we got a cable from her saying that she had left France and was driving an ambulance in England. She was going to be a film actress, you see." I remembered her dark, Indian beauty. "It was the only thing she could do, and she had just made a start when the war broke out."

"Well, you must come and visit us in Bombay as soon as we know what our plans are," I said, a little desperately.

They both laughed. The younger one said, "The States aren't like the Arabian nights these days! There aren't harems and dancing-girls and things—sometimes I wish there were; it would be more exciting—it's just a tight and rather Victorian life. We have to stay as much as possible within the palace grounds and associate only with the palace people. It wouldn't be so bad if we hadn't lived in France. . . ."

Mother reminded us that if we wanted to see Fatepur Sikri we had better start, so we left the two princesses to their tepid coffee and papaya and went to find the chauffeur. But during the drive we returned to a discussion of the life of the rulers of the Indian States. Mother agreed that the whole system was outdated and would probably collapse without its outside props. The people were ready for another form of government, a less feudal one, and the rulers themselves, except in rare cases, had only a financial interest in their States. For the most part they delegated the actual government to appointed ministers.

Fatepur Sikri, the half-finished walled city, capital for Akbar, the greatest of the Moguls, remains as a disintegrating symbol of the old power of the princes. We found it, in contrast to the Taj Mahal, alive and intimate. We walked through the palace rooms, saw the queen's bedroom, with its covered bed and unfinished murals, visited the temples of different denominations within the royal city for the courtiers of different religions. Even in those days Indians believed in religious tolerance. It was on that basis, Mother told us, that Akbar had unified India.

"We have," she pointed out, "a far longer history of unity and

tolerance than any of the Western countries. More than two hundred years B.C. we had a great emperor, Ashoka, who united India and preserved religious freedom for all his subjects. That's why many of us find it a little hard to believe that what we are given to understand about the present religious unrest in India is either entirely true or particularly deep-seated. At the time Akbar ruled, about seventeen hundred years later, we had tolerance, unity and freedom too. Fatepur Sikri proves some of those things, and our own records—which you never learned about, and which I read only after I left school—show that Indians have always valued those qualities. Whenever we are given the chance we do act as a nation to institute a unified government."

The sun burned on the deep red sandstone buildings with their marble decorations, on the great courts, causeways, the half-completed throne-rooms and galleries, the domestic buildings and the more recent, poor little houses clinging to the city walls. We gazed out from the terraces and balconies down the ravine, the sides of which were encrusted with the huts of the peasants, to the immense burnt plains of central India. We saw, but no longer commented on, the flat, shocking contrast between the old decaying splendour and the new shoddiness and poverty. Like all tourists, we saw in imagination Fatepur Sikri as the centre of a great kingdom, and speculated about the reasons for its desertion. Disease? The changing course of the river? Superstition? There could have been a hundred reasons. We went back to the car with slight headaches and no appetite.

We reached Delhi just in time to take the night train to Bombay. As we unrolled on the berths the bedding which one always carries on train journeys in India, Premila said, "When you think about it, we have a much easier job of adjustment and a far pleasanter life to adjust to."

I didn't quite understand her because I was wondering why the train companies didn't supply bedding, and whether it was a sanitation or a laundry problem.

"Than who?" I asked.

"Oh, Indians," Premila said vaguely.

I thought I understood then. Were we perhaps in the same position as other Indians, and not isolated at all? Were most Indians trying to find a life compatible with their thousands of years of history and culture (not a dead history and culture, for almost every stage of it is alive in India somewhere) and still in

tune with the new ways? And wasn't this life made up of political compulsions on the private citizen, of change and adjustment and a search for common ground in spite of personal bitterness and delay? Could the Nationalist movement help erase the difference among all Indians and secure for them the common ground on which to build?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHERE CHANGE IS NOT WELCOME

WHENEVER YOU come back to a city everything seems to be on the wrong side of the street. You feel like a stranger in a disturbingly familiar place. It was late autumn of 1940 when Mother, Premila and I returned to Bombay, this time for inland India. The city looked damp and seedy. I had the uneasy feeling you get when you visit someone too early in the morning. From the taxi window we saw a crowd of people staring out to the horizon from the beach by the Marine Drive. They had the pathetically bright and dirty look of all Indian crowds.

"Oh, the cocoanuts, of course!" Mother said, with her usual obscure allusiveness. "I didn't realize it was so late in the year."

"Looks like a pleasant outdoor sport," Premila said in a hearty British voice.

Mother still found Premila rather puzzling. "They throw the cocoanuts out to sea," she explained, "and float decorated images on the waves. It's part of a ceremony of thanksgiving that the monsoon is over."

"A little premature, aren't they?"

Premila rolled up the taxi windows as with typical suddenness the rain came down. People melted away from the beaches, the sea became solid and dull, while the road awoke to a glittering life of its own.

The Colaba house had a submerged look about it. The reed matting was stretched across the verandas to keep out the rain, wide patches of damp spread on the stone floors, the paint was beginning to peel from the walls; the house had to be redecorated every autumn. Inside, the ceiling fans whirred incessantly, swirling the hot and humid air to every corner of the room. The furniture was covered with raffia mats, carpets had been rolled away, and *daris*—rope floor coverings—had been placed in every room.

My grandmother appeared from an inner room with her finger on her lips. "He has fallen asleep at last. This evening perhaps you can see him." She seemed embarrassed that she had put her concern into words before she had welcomed us formally. "I am sorry that I was unable to make some sweets for your arrival. I should have told Asha . . ."

"But of course not," I broke in, "with Grandfather so sick—we would hardly expect ——"

"It was remiss of me," she said, dismissing my remark.

She looked much older; her face was heavily shadowed, but her tidiness and her compact dignity had not changed.

Asha had remembered the jasmins, and brought us each a cluster, but her own jasmins were turning brown—she must have put them on early that morning and forgotten that they would not last till the afternoon, for her hair was still in a long braid instead of the traditional knot.

"*Namasthé* Dhan-*masi*." She bowed over her folded hands in the formal Indian greeting for one's elders. "Welcome home." She turned to Premila and me. "Are you well? We are glad to have you back at last."

We all went up to our rooms, Mother and Premila to "lie flat", as they share the cat-like ability to sleep anywhere at any time, and I to unpack my clothes. Asha looked a little distressed. If I would leave my things until the household rose from its siesta, one of the servants would unpack for me—it would really be more dignified.

I assured her that I had nothing else to do, and as sickness in a house puts so great a burden on the servants they would probably appreciate being relieved of unnecessary duties. Asha disappeared, looking worried. In a few minutes the ayah came in, heavy-eyed and resentful. I sat helplessly on the bed while she placed my clothes in closets. She put my shoes in an airtight box to keep them from getting mildewed in the last few days of the monsoon, and shut small electric heaters into the cupboards to save my saris from the damp. She held up each garment as she pulled it out of my suitcase.

"Is this pure silk? I have heard that Miss Sahib can buy saris that appear to be silk and are not truly so."

Everything that was artificial silk she placed disdainfully in a pile at arm's length.

"Miss Sahib must be certain these clothes are never left out in the room at night. They will be eaten by the cockroaches."

After dinner that evening my grandmother told us that we might visit Grandfather. He had awakened and was feeling a little stronger. I expected to be shown into the usual sick-room. However personal a room is in ordinary life, as soon as it becomes a sick-room it seems to take on a glazed, sterilized appearance. Its character is drained away by the shiny white enamel bowls; the furniture seems to be more bare, and there are bottles and teaspoons on every shelf. I noticed that my grandmother's sari looked a little crumpled and there was a slight smudge on the edge of her red caste mark. The bedroom was dim; the green shaded light turned away from the bed looked out of place and cold. In one corner there was a small decorated shrine, on the carved table by the bed three garlands were twisted with tinsel and yellow flowers. Otherwise the room looked exactly as it always did. Even the familiar disinfectant sick-room smell was absent or drowned in the smoky fragrance of joss-sticks from the shrine. The servants were singing in the courtyard and quarrelling in loud voices. The ayah screamed at them with casual fierceness.

Inside his box of mosquito netting, my grandfather lay perfectly still. He looked incredibly old and somehow distant. His face was almost grey.

"I'm pleased that you found time to visit me," he said, with incongruous briskness. "Shivan and Kitty should be coming soon, if I am not wrong?"

"Oh yes . . . yes, I'm sure . . ."

I felt he might be delirious.

"But Sanjiv has always been such a worry to me." He smiled, as he thought of his oldest son. "A philosopher, I am afraid. Nothing can tear him away from his college. I had hoped that I would have the whole family about me when I died."

I caught Premila's eye, and saw that she, too, was shocked. Everybody else in the room treated my grandfather's statement as perfectly natural. Nobody contradicted his assumption or commented on it.

The bearer was slowly preparing to go to bed on his mat on the veranda, where he would be within call if he were needed in the night. My grandmother told the ayah to sleep on the floor at the bottom of her bed, in case she, too, were needed; then she stood over the charcoal-burner near the shrine, throwing something into the embers.

My grandfather looked up apologetically. "She is burning chilis," he explained. "They are intended only to ward off the

Evil Eye, but she extends their protective power to sickness too."

We stood by his bed for a few more minutes, embarrassed and silent. The mosquitoes sang in the dark corners; the evening damp streamed into the room through the French doors; the crickets in the garden were growing quiet. At last Grandfather dismissed us. We would all be called if he felt he might die in the night. He had, Asha told us, refused to see a doctor because he did not particularly care whether or not he were given an additional couple of years of life. Besides, he placed very little trust in the ability of doctors.

This was the only cool moment of the day, and Asha and Premila and I walked down the garden to the sea.

"Would you like to go to the cinema?" Asha asked.

"Do you think we ought to? I mean Grandfather——"

"Grandmother would have told us if she wanted us to stay here this evening."

So we walked to the movies in Colaba. The cinema was a shabby building, apparently built quickly and carelessly. The corrugated-iron roof held in the day's heat with suffocating efficiency. We missed the beginning of the film, but by the time we had seen the final three hours of the picture I was too exhausted to feel any regret.

On the beaten mud floor of the theatre sat the audience of servants, *tonga*-drivers, petty clerks and inspectors. They talked and laughed all through the movie, wandered out to buy sweets, asked their neighbour about the parts they had missed, and joined in the songs. At the back of the hall the more well-to-do spectators sat on chairs placed on a low platform. The picture was a popular Hindustani concoction, well supplied with songs and dances and covering three generations in the history of one family. Premila and I both knew Hindustani well enough by now to be able to follow the dialogue with ease, if not with interest. The music still seemed harsh and unfamiliarly melodic, the acting obvious and the story naïve.

The only aspect of the film which impressed us was the representation of village life and the problems of the land labourer. Asha told us that there were comparatively few non-religious costume romances, and practically no fast-moving comedies. The "escapist" pictures have apparently no appeal for Indian audiences. India is so much a country of villages that, to many millions of people, the situations and conditions of city life are

both unfamiliar and incomprehensible. Poverty, hunger and the continual struggle to get a living from the land are so formidable a part of our national consciousness that they work their way into the movies too. There seems to be, Asha assured us, a definite effort on the part of producers to make films in which the audience can recognize their own problems, their difficulties, their humour, their lives, largely because any other type of picture—the drawing-room comedy or the gangster film—is meaningless to most Indians.

My grandmother was waiting for us when we came in. The servant who had accompanied us to the movie salaamed and waited to be dismissed. He was sent instead to fetch some buttermilk for us to drink before we went to bed. A year before I would have announced that I did not like buttermilk and that it should not be drunk before going to bed. But that night I just drank it quickly, and found that it did not taste at all bad.

By the time Kitty and Shivan arrived the next day, Grandfather was already out of danger. The household began to resume its usual character—the bearer was told he could return to the servants' quarters at night; my grandmother sat with us at meals again. Shivan, with characteristic energy and impatience, spent the next few days in a series of interviews and calls. As usual, he had innumerable people to see, countless meetings and parties to attend. His charming smile and mild eyes, behind bi-focals, were seen everywhere in Bombay. Sometimes Premila and I went with him, but often he left the house at six in the morning to begin his crowded day. Meanwhile, Mother and Kitty would hurry off to their committees and social work.

The day before Shivan left he told me he was returning to Delhi through Wardha, Gandhi's headquarters, and asked me if I would like to go with him and perhaps be present at some of the interviews he was planning to have with Gandhi. I was, of course, extremely excited, and found Mother at once to tell her of Shivan's suggestion. While Mother was saying, "I'm certain you'll find it interesting . . ." my grandmother came into the room.

"What are all these schemes for sending the child off with Shivan?" she demanded. She sounded forbidding.

"It's madly exciting—I can't imagine anything more——" .

"Wardha is only a dusty little village in the middle of India. I do not feel you need the contact with Gandhi's Ashram."

"But I *want* to go. I haven't seen him since I've been old enough to make sense of politics and——"

"That is precisely the trouble. You have been encouraged to an unhealthy interest in politics." She addressed herself to Mother, "That is no field for girls."

I looked at Mother. "Mrs. Das' daughter is at Wardha," she said casually.

The Dases were a prominent literary family.

"The Dases," said my grandmother, "are not Brahmins." As she turned to leave the room she smiled at me. "I asked the *mali's* boy to bring you a cat if you still want one as a pet."

So it was again with a mixture of irritation and affection that I blurted out to Mother the arguments I would have liked to address to my grandmother.

"Darling, this is your grandmother's house," Mother said conclusively. "There will be other opportunities for you to go to Wardha."

She looked thoughtful, and I had the impression she was about to say something else, but it was not until later that I discovered what she was speculating about.

I didn't disguise my disappointment from Shivan, but, like every other member of the family, he, too, obeyed my grandmother's wishes. He, however, followed her orders with a definite feeling that he was indulging her. This, it seemed to me, might mark the first step in the loss of her power over the members of her family.

"You should be used to it after more than a year in India," he told me. "I know how hard this kind of adjustment can be."

Then, as much to take my mind off my feeling of injury as to illustrate his point, he told me about his first attempt at adjustment to a strange culture. It was while Father's family still lived in their home in south India that Shivan was first sent abroad. My grandmother insisted that he know something of English manners and customs before he left the country. Accordingly, before he sailed for England, he was to spend a few weeks in Bombay, staying at a hotel instead of with relatives in the customary way. By now no one remembers just how the family came by the name of the "hotel" at which Shivan was to stay—certainly no member of the family will claim it as his idea. To this day my grandmother will admit only that it was "unnecessarily frivolous" as a residence for a proper young man. When Shivan, bewildered but interested, wrote to his parents describing the "hotel" life, it was my grandmother who went to his rescue.

Shivan left for Wardha early the morning following this conversation, and Kitty took the train back to Delhi. As the sounds of their departure faded, Mother came into our room with her morning cup of coffee in her hand. She sat on the end of Premila's bed.

"Don't move your knees, darling. I want to put my cup there."

She stirred her coffee slowly and pensively.

"How would you two feel," Mother began, "if we moved into a house of our own, instead of staying here with your grandmother?"

"In Bombay?"

"It does seem the least provincial, don't you think?"

Premila and I said nothing; we had been in India long enough to begin to dread the unconventional.

"The thing that really decided me," Mother continued, as if we had agreed with her, "was a letter from Anna. Apparently we must dismantle what is left of our London apartment, so you see we have to think about making some kind of a permanent home somewhere. Your father will be back from South Africa early next year . . ."

I thought she was going to say something more, but she didn't. For the first time, it occurred to me that this period of readjustment must have been difficult for her, too. After so many years of travel away from India, when she knew that her world was what she chose to make it, it must have required tremendous tolerance and patience to accept so smoothly the fixed patterns of the Indian culture we had re-entered in my grandmother's home. She has never, as far as I can remember, expressed any regret at the loss, that year, of her beautiful crystal and silver, which was still in our home in London. She has never spoken about the jewellery she had left there, or about her saris, or Father's library. She had had to be independent of possessions for too long to feel anything but impatience at having to worry about them.

"Well," Premila said at last, "let's have a swimming-pool, anyway."

We were at last going to have a home of our own. Now we would be able to try out all our plans and theories. If we understood India at all, if there was any place for us in Indian life, we would at last know. It was with considerable relief that I thought of what I called to myself "action". There wouldn't be the shelter of my grandmother's household to obscure the issues, there would only be necessary conflicts and unprejudiced answers.

Later that morning Premila and I were called to a conference with my grandmother. She had finished her daily "audience hour", as we had named it. This was the time when any servant or worker on the compound who had a grievance—that the work was too much, that his wife wouldn't obey him, that he wanted more pay—could bring his troubles to my grandmother for remedy or arbitration. She gave us permission to sit down.

"Your mother tells me," she began in the familiar way, "that she feels you should live somewhere a little nearer the centre of the city, that Colaba is inconvenient both for her work and for the things you two are planning to do."

I caught Premila's eye; she, too, was smiling at Mother's habitual tact.

My grandmother turned to me. "What kind of work is it that you are planning to do?"

"Well, writing of some sort, I suppose——"

I was about to add that I wanted a job on a newspaper, when she interrupted me.

"That seems like sensible work, fitting to a girl. You can stay at home, and perhaps you can learn from your mother how to manage a small house. Later on you can come back here and I will show you how to run a larger household."

"But I mean I want to write and be printed—you know, earn some money that way."

"Possibly," answered my grandmother, dismissing the question, "we can have your writings published privately."

I decided not to bring up my journalistic ambitions.

"You must be sure," she added, "that you do not show yourself as too intellectual, else your mother will have even greater trouble in finding you a husband."

In answer to a further question Premila told Grandmother that she was not at all particular about the kind of work she did; she just wanted to be working because she couldn't stand being idle any longer.

"Work for the sake of working," my grandmother said incredulously, "when you have so much to learn about your people and your country? I do not even mention your ignorance regarding the everyday essentials of family living."

"I thought," Premila said, "that there could scarcely be a better way of learning about the Indian people."

"There is no need," Grandmother answered with finality, "for you to learn in that way about the *common* people. It is about

your *own* people that you know nothing. If you work at a job you will meet none of them."

"Perhaps I shall make other friends."

"That is what I fear. Let me hear no more of such sentimentality. I will speak to your mother . . ."

We sat silent for a moment, embarrassed and somehow guilty. My grandmother smiled with characteristic charm and sweetness.

"I am sorry to lose you two," she said. "I had hoped to share your lives to some extent. But the days change, the days change." She unfastened her gold necklace. She had never before taken it off since it had come to her as part of her inheritance from her grandmother. As she placed it in Premila's hand she said, "Blessings on you, my child."

She slipped the matching bracelet off her left wrist and handed it to me. I looked at it helplessly. It was far too small; I could get only three fingers inside it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A HOME OF OUR OWN

IT WAS a fortnight later that Mother sat on a packing-box in the middle of the empty, stone-floored space that was to be our drawing-room and said, "I certainly hope that being near the sea is going to be some compensation for living in this absurdly cramped little place."

Premila smoothed her hips. "How lovely to be able to wear slacks again!"

Just then the door-bell rang. We looked at each other startled, and exclaimed almost together, "Not visitors!"

A moment later a high, slightly affected voice called, "May I come in? Your front door is open, so I suppose you aren't all dead from exhaustion."

Nona Sen, small and pretty, picked her way around the boxes and wrapping-paper. She was dressed impractically in a yellow chiffon sari and gold French sandals.

Laughing in her thin, social way, she said, "We live next door to you, and I simply *had* to come over and make a nuisance of myself." She turned to Mother. "I've seen your girls at parties and things, but I don't think we've ever met. My mother went to

college with you, so of course this call is a *duty* as well as a pleasure." She smiled to show she didn't mean it. "Oh, these absurd clothes! I've just come from the most grisly cocktail party." She called back into the hall, "Bearer! Bearer!"

Mother, Premila and I sat looking quite stunned while Nona's servant appeared with a picnic hamper. She chattered on, gossiping about people we did not know, asking questions, making suggestions, as her bearer spread out an enormous meal on two packing-boxes which he had covered with an exquisite Irish linen cloth trimmed with lace. There was iced consommé, hot chicken curry, and for dessert trifle and strawberries—a meal I will never forget. After a few more minutes Nona rose.

"I'll send my bearer back at about nine to deal with the mess, shall I? My husband is dying to meet all of you—won't you dine with us on Tuesday? Now *please*—we'll be *so* disappointed . . . just call me up if there's *any*thing you need. I would have brought you some flowers, only they're *such* a nuisance when you've nowhere to put them, aren't they? You *do* have a divine view—like Naples, sort of. Well, darlings, I must dash. . . . Good-night . . . good-night. . . ."

We went for our first swim that night, and felt as if we were playing truant. I drifted about on my back in the water and watched the moving points of light where the stars were reflected. The wind carried the faint smell of fish and tar from the harbour. The servants in the neighbouring compound were singing evening hymns. I wondered how one set about looking for a job in Bombay. Tomorrow I would start.

Walking back over the lawn, I could just see Premila striding along beside me swinging her bathing-cap.

"I say," she said suddenly, "I suppose you can help Mother with the furniture and choosing hangings and things, can't you?"

"Yes, of course," I said, puzzled. "Can't you?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. You see, I have to start work tomorrow."

"At anything in particular?" I was still not used to Premila's surprises.

"It's sort of complicated. There was this man I met at Amrita's party. He has a sort of magazine—at least, it's still awfully new, just starting out, you know, and——"

"What's it called?" I asked, trying to make sense of what she was saying.

"*Art and Culture.*" Her voice sounded very small.

"Good God!"

"But honestly, you can't judge from the name. I mean he seemed fearfully intelligent, and of course he asked me to dance——"

"He *must* have been intelligent," I put in with sisterly sarcasm.

"You seem to be taking a very petty attitude about this."

"I'm just reserving judgment. I suppose you forgot to ask how much it pays."

"I didn't forget exactly. But, well, the moon was out, and we were on Amrita's balcony when he offered me the job, and it seemed like an awfully mundane thing to bring up . . ."

"Dear Premila, you're amazing," I said.

In a couple of days she discovered that she was the assistant editor of the magazine and was being paid 100 rupees a month—about 30 dollars. But that night both the duties and her salary were still vague to her.

"Don't you think you had better tell Mother about it?"

"You don't suppose she'll object, do you?"

"Well, let's find out."

We dripped our way down the stone-floored passage to Mother's room and asked her what she thought of Premila's scheme. She seemed a little disturbed about it, but was obviously trying to be liberal. She said that it would be all right if Premila would consent not to earn money at it. But Premila, who did not approve of working on an honorary basis, claimed that if she was worth hiring, she was worth money. Mother explained patiently that that wasn't the point. She didn't object to her daughter having a job, but these days in India it wasn't the thing for someone who didn't need money to take the bread out of a more needy mouth.

"And that," she added, "is not a figure of speech."

"Oh *Mother*! You're being awfully reactionary about this. I must have a job because I simply can't sit around doing nothing any longer."

"Why don't you come and work with me?"

It was a surprise to have Mother come out so casually with that question. She had never suggested such a thing before. I supposed that she was beginning to feel we were becoming better equipped to work with Indians on Indian problems. I felt vaguely flattered for Premila.

"But I'm much more use at magazine work than at running

canteens. I'll promise to wangle in an article for one of your causes every month."

"Well, darling, I can't say I really approve, but I expect I'll have to leave you to find out for yourself just why. Will you in return do something for me? If you must work on this magazine —what did you say it was called?—I'd like you to do it anonymously." She smiled. "I want to retain some standing with my own friends."

"And a daughter earning money on a magazine would shatter it?"

"Not exactly, but it would be a little embarrassing. Since you can't appear on the masthead as 'Honorary Assistant Editor', it would probably be better if you didn't appear at all, and then you won't be telling an exact lie, but I can safely hope that the question will never come up among my associates."

Premila sighed. "All right, all right. But if I want to change jobs, I'll cite this one as experience, then your little skeleton will pop out."

She went to work the next day wearing a white cotton sari, with her hair smoothed back in an exact imitation of Mother's when she was dressed for one of her village committee meetings.

While Mother ordered furniture and inspected the conditions under which the men who were making it worked, I wandered through the bazaar sections of Bombay, guided and escorted by my grandmother's house-boy. Mother had given me instructions about choosing the curtains. After she had made sure that I understood the measurements, colours and materials needed, she wrote in capitals at the bottom of the list she handed me: BUY ONLY *KHADI* CLOTH—that is, the hand-spun and hand-woven cloth made in the Indian villages, the cloth that nationalistic Indians buy to show their sympathy with the Congress cause.

Nona, in her talkative way, was immensely helpful. It was her bearer who found our servants for us—his brother-in-law became our cook, his daughter Mother's ayah. Nona sent over her *dhobi* to launder our clothes, her *mali* to bring us flowers for the house and jasmins every morning. She helped me bargain with merchants, or told me about "the most enchanting little dive" where I could get hand-made brocades made to my own patterns for "absolutely a song, darling". I always think of her reclining on a wicker chaise-longue beside the inevitable tray of drinks, looking pretty and completely incompetent. All her friends envied her

ability—so highly prized among Indian housewives—to run a perfect house with no apparent effort or thought. Nona's own view of herself was summed up in a conversation with Premila.

"You poor *angel*!" she said. "How bored you must have been, to turn intellectual on us! I was brought up in France, you know—almost exactly your situation—and I was practically driven to taking a job when I got back, but it was really much too hot to work, so I got married instead. Such a relief, darling; you can simply let yourself *go*."

She elongated the sound to "go-oo".

Nona decided to "take us in hand", and in the next few weeks we were plunged into the most rapid social race of the winter season in Bombay. Garden-parties, races, dances, sailing in somebody's yacht, swimming from somebody's shack on Juhu beach—it was the restless, breathless life of people with nothing on their minds but new ways of avoiding boredom. We met the rootless Indians who knew enough of Europe to be dissatisfied with their lives in India, but had never explored their own country deeply enough to find their compensation in it. Too much money, too much spare time had developed in them an almost desperate eagerness to keep moving. They had a superficial scorn for the old families who preserved their traditions, and a slight envy of the English society they could not enter. At a beach party once, in Juhu, the contrast reminded me of my grandmother's attitude towards the British. Suddenly she seemed to me dignified almost to nobility.

It was at one of their parties, where the women were talking clothes and gossip, and the men seemed extraordinarily inane, because their only interest was their work and they were forbidden by convention to "talk shop" before the ladies, that I first met Peter Pendle. He was among the scatter of Americans and Englishmen who often attended parties like this, feeling democratic for mixing with the Indians, yet rather excited at being with a social group which would have been far beyond their means in England. Premila beckoned to me across the room, and as I approached whispered in an all-too-audible voice:

"He works for a publisher—just sent out to the Bombay branch —might be able to give you a job. Peter," she said aloud, "I want you to meet my sister . . ."

Peter was a tall, stooping Englishman, with a pleasant, self-conscious voice and the appealing manner of a good *raconteur*. He had not been in India long, but even in the past few weeks he had

learnt that he would never find out about India from the English clubs or in the tight European social circle. In his attempt to reach the people of India he had been drawn, as had so many well-meaning Englishmen before him, into the group of Indians least representative of the people of the country. He was uncomfortable in this strange, artificial society, and equally ill at ease in the careful exclusiveness of British functions.

He said, "Tell me about these people. I feel as if I had got into a movie instead of being in the audience."

Premila and he and I talked about mutual friends, places in England, life and personalities in Bombay. There was a moment of embarrassment when he asked with real eagerness if he might some day call on my grandmother because she sounded delightful. We had to explain that she did not receive English people at all. To cover this slight unpleasantness he quickly asked us if we would go swimming with him some time at a "charming little place, Breach Kandy". When we told him that Breach Kandy was not open to Indians, we all laughed, feeling we shared a superiority to the absurd prejudices and restrictions of the people around us. As we were leaving, Premila invited him to our house on Sunday to swim from there instead of from Breach Kandy.

At home, Mother was, as usual, telephoning. She had long lists of possible social workers on whom she would call when their assistance was needed in some new project. She looked up.

"Was the party amusing? I hope there wasn't the usual quota of rajahs and princes there, they seem to flood the cities during the season, now that they can't go to the *Côté d'Azur*. Do try to avoid them when you see them at parties, darlings. They really aren't good company—too fast for what I hope is your taste—and very few of them are Brahmins. It would upset your grandmother terribly if she thought you were making friends with any of them."

Mother went on to tell us about her day. She was already back in the thick of meetings and speeches. She is by nature too active a woman to keep out of civic work for very long.

"I may have to go up to Allahabad for the All-India Women's Conference next month. I seem to have been nominated for the elections . . ." her voice came indistinctly from her bedroom.

Premila looked at me. "How does she do it?" she sighed.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

PARLOUR AND NATIONALIST POLITICS

MOTHER CAME into my room one morning about a week later and told me to get up quickly and dress. She wanted me to meet a very good friend of hers—Mrs. Naidu, the Indian poet and Congress leader—who had just arrived in Bombay, and was staying at the house of Bhulabhai Desai, another notable figure in Nationalist politics. Mrs. Naidu held a kind of miniature court in the early mornings. Many of her younger friends, students in Bombay colleges, sons and daughters of her contemporaries, would gather round her and talk about literature and politics, or gossip. In the afternoon Mrs. Naidu would devote herself to the more important political matters and social engagements.

When she saw Mother and me on the veranda of the palatial Desai home she shouted to us to come in at once, where *had* we been for—how long was it—eleven years? She stared at Mother carefully, and announced crisply:

"Well, at last you're beginning to lose your looks, and about time. It's indecent for a woman your age to provide so much competition for these infants we are trying to get off our hands."

Mother looked unembarrassed, "And you, my dear Sarojini, are the one unchanging thing in India."

"Of course there are those," Mrs. Naidu continued, "who might think that white streak in your hair is becoming, but I can't help feeling it ages you. Yes, it definitely ages you." She turned to me, "Come here, dear; what's your name? . . . Really? How absurd! What could your mother have been thinking of? Do you know, in the old days in Madras—your mother was at college and my family home was there—it was a fad to be in love with your mother. All my brothers were. No boy could grow up without going through it—like the measles."

By now the attention of the entire group was centred on us. I was not as poised in ignoring it, or appearing to think it natural, as my mother.

"Tell all these charming people what you do," she suggested to me. "You must *do* something. Oh, now I remember, I distinctly remember—you *write*. Is it precious little gems of poetry like my things? Or," her voice sank, "long, heavy *tracts*?"

Mrs. Naidu never gave me a chance to answer, for she was already talking to someone else, plunging into the middle of some

new topic. All that morning she sat like a small immovable mountain in an armchair placed so that she could monopolize the conversation. She had no hesitation about shouting to make herself heard, about deliberately misunderstanding some remark, about laughing at first one and then another member of the party. Her store of slightly malicious but hilarious stories about friends or public figures seemed inexhaustible. She ate cashew nuts from the table beside her and remained throughout those hours in a state of physically static animation.

If too many people were drawn into an argument in another part of the veranda, Mrs. Naidu would raise her voice a little higher, laugh louder, or create an instant diversion by unwrapping the top part of her sari to reveal her blouse, made of material printed with the jacket design of her most recent favourite book, in this case Masani's *Our India*. Into her characteristic mixture of wit and malice and normal conversation she inserted numerous casual but penetrating remarks. She was not so blind as she seemed to the effect she had on people around her.

After announcing that she considered her greatest achievement not the position she had held as the first woman president of the Indian National Congress, but her success in injecting some humour into Indian politics, she said to me quietly under cover of the conversation, "You are having more trouble than you anticipated finding a life in India, aren't you? I'm afraid we underrate the problems of readjustment here." She looked round the veranda, at the tasteful blending of Indian styles of furniture —low tables, flat, short-legged stools, *daris* and brassware—with Western comfort in spring cushions or wheeled wagons to hold drinks. "I suppose," she said, "that this seems like an unsatisfactory compromise. If only the young were not so conservative."

I remember sitting on the cool stone floor as the heat of that morning grew more intense, and watching the young Indians around me, trying to decide what other Indian girls with no particular training did in this new changing India where their rigid established place was lost and where they had not yet acquired the freedom and status of Western girls. I had already found out that one could earn money with social approval at only minor lady-like jobs—writing for the radio occasionally or contributing to magazines for the fun of it. The work, like Mother's, that demanded any initiative or any consuming interest needed also an ability to live off one's family more or less indefinitely.

Only Anglo-Indians took jobs as secretaries, or in adminis-

trative or executive positions. We were allowed to live lives superficially like Western girls, but we could never evade the underlying restrictions.

Mrs. Naidu's young friends seemed secure. To them India was an astonishingly modern country—look how far it had progressed in the last few years. They felt only their own enormous responsibility to a society in which they were members of an educated ten per cent who must put all their education at the disposal of the less fortunate ninety per cent. They were, as Mother had said, contributing.

Just before we left Mrs. Naidu's gathering, Kamala Beri moved across from her place to mine.

"I have been meaning to call on you for some time," she said. "My mother-in-law and your mother were good friends in England. Felt the affinity of exiles, I daresay."

I thought as I listened to her pleasant, quiet voice with its slight American accent that this would be just another pleasant social contact. Already I was formulating the invitation to tea sometime next week, before it would be her turn to invite Premila and me to dinner and the movies. But she continued, "My work keeps me pretty busy, but I particularly wanted to meet you because someone told me you were looking for a job."

I listened to her more carefully. Since I had been forbidden to conduct the usual job-hunt, I had to rely entirely on personal contacts and friends of friends.

Yes, I told her, I would like to hear about her work. I learned with fading interest that it was honorary.

"But," Kamala continued, "if you hope to be useful in India these days, I'm afraid you can't expect to be paid for it."

I learned from Mother that Mrs. Naidu had come for the meeting of the working committee of the Congress Party in Bombay that October. Nehru was expected to arrive soon.

Throughout the summer and early autumn of 1940, while we were in Kashmir, the Indian people had been waiting impatiently for a move from either the British Government or the Congress. In July the Congress had offered co-operation in the war effort on condition of the recognition of Indian independence and the establishment of a provisional National government to organize the defence of India and the Indian part in the war. The offer had not been accepted by the Government, and this meeting of the Congress in Bombay was to formulate the Indian policy after

the new setback. Mother asked me if I would like to go to the meeting and listen to the speeches.

"You may not have a chance to see another for a long time, if any form of civil disobedience begins."

Nehru came to dinner with us a couple of nights before the meeting. The dinner is memorable for what it revealed of our cook, a hard-faced and taciturn man who was, as far as we knew, uninterested in anything outside his family. We used to see him sometimes sitting in the servants' compound behind the house with his sons around him. In ordering the menu for dinner Mother happened to mention casually the name of the guest. That evening, to her astonishment, scarcely anything that she had ordered appeared on the table. The dinner was excellent, but inexplicably original. Nehru remarked how clever it was of Mother to remember his tastes, but we thought he was only being polite. He seemed tired and depleted, very different from his Kashmir mood. Later, when Mother questioned the cook about it, he admitted that he had changed the menu of his own accord because he was so great an admirer of Nehru's.

"He will be the saviour of our country," he said, forgetting to add "Memsahib".

He had discovered where Nehru was staying in Bombay, had questioned the servants of that household to find out what Nehru's special tastes were, and had bought the groceries out of his own money. When Mother offered to refund the money to him he refused. That was his private service to the Nationalist cause.

From the windows of the great hall at Sewri, a Bombay suburb, the waiting crowd in the open place at the front seemed to move in the white and shifting patterns of rice-grains. Occasional shivers of colour came in when the group of school children waved their green-and-yellow Congress flags; and the thin path that had been cleared from the road to the door of the building was guarded by girls in the saffron-coloured saris of sacrifice. There were no policemen. There were conspicuously no uniforms, unless the white Gandhi cap can be called a uniform. The weeks of tension since the British rejection of the Congress offer seemed to be reaching some kind of climax in this meeting of the All-India National Congress for the occasion of Gandhi's resuming leadership.

Heat rose from the ground in steaming waves. I turned away from the window to look at the people inside the hall who were

waiting for the meeting to open. In the press gallery the representatives of various papers were making an attempt at easy conversation, but tension was apparent in their manner. The English journalists were over-hearty. "What weather!" one would say with a gasp of laughter. "It's easy to see why he wears a loin cloth!" Or they were exaggeratedly bored: "How long, oh Lord, how long?" . . . "If all the time I spend waiting for people were given back to me—gosh, I'd be bored!"

They were very conscious of their Palm Beach suits when they went across to talk to the *khaddar*-dressed journalists from the Indian newspapers. They realized, and in some obscure way resented, the fact that to the Indians the speeches today would not mean merely a business duty between polo and an evening's bridge. Almost, they seemed to envy the energetic belief of those serious young men in ill-fitting clothes. As Westerners, they seemed to have lost that sense of personal importance in their national history. I think they felt rather keenly thair position as onlookers rather than as participators in these dramatic moments of India's political history.

The gallery opposite the journalists was filled with the members of Nona's set and other similar social groups. Many of the women were there because it was rapidly becoming fashionable to be pro-Congress in an ineffectual and conversational way. Besides, it was a good way of wasting the afternoon hours before the time they met their husbands for cocktails at the Club. The women who were really interested in the Congress movement and were a part of its work sat with the rest of the crowd on the floor. Many of them had dyed the borders of their saris with the Congress colours. One might easily hear two simultaneous conversations, one intelligently conducted on Indian politics, and one on the usual gossip about Congress personalities whom the speakers knew socially yet hopelessly misunderstood politically.

"So, of course, she's been following him for years, and I will admit that he's good-looking; but he hasn't looked at another woman since his wife died. Anyway, he's wrapped up in his only daughter . . ."

The floor of the hall was covered with people. With a typically Indian lack of restraint, they were talking and joking with their neighbours, sharing their corn from screws of newspaper, and squatting on the ground in friendly disorder. A Congress flag was draped behind the platform where the Working Committee would sit later, but there were no chairs for them.

We were all impatient to hear Gandhi's speech resuming leadership of the Congress, for the July offer had caused his resignation. He had maintained his convictions of non-violence, and had left the Congress for reasons of personal philosophy, not politics. To him any compromise, however rewarding, was impossible if it involved aggression and fighting on the part of Indians.

After the British reply to the July proposals, the Congress appealed to Gandhi to return to the leadership of the Party. Now it was rumoured that he had accepted. Today we were to find out. We were to know, too, what conditions he had made for his return. Above all, we hoped he would reveal the Congress policy for the near future.

The crowd outside quieted suddenly. Watching from the window, I saw Gandhi climb carefully out of the car. Nehru offered to help him, but he waved assistance away. Together, he and Nehru began to walk towards the building. I was astonished, almost shocked, to see that they were laughing—the tiny, dark man, as ugly as a monkey, and his taller handsome companion, the two men who were so largely responsible for India's future. I don't know why their laughter should have surprised me so greatly. I suppose I had always imagined politicians to be tired, solemn men wearing their cares visibly on their shoulders. The crowd outside threw a final wave of shouts—"*Jai—jai Mahatmaji*"—over Gandhi's disappearing figure, then settled down in the heat and the dust to listen to the speeches which would reach them over the loudspeakers.

There was absolute silence in the hall while the Working Committee sat down. One of the attendants came in carrying a spinning-wheel, which he set up on the side of the platform. The suspense was by this time enormous. Finally, Gandhi came in. He took no notice of the cheering. He simply sat down on the floor by his spinning-wheel, and with the utmost composure began to spin. The newspapermen always watch his spinning; every time something annoys him, although he smiles and nods his head, his thread breaks.

Behind him on the platform sat Rajagopalacharia, a Congress leader from the South. He was frowning heavily. Nehru sat near the centre of the platform. He faced the audience impersonally, remote yet sympathetic. Now that he was nearer I could see the heavy shadows under his eyes. A high, smothered giggle announced that, with her usual lack of respect for persons and places, Mrs. Naidu was trying to amuse Abdul Gaffar Khan, the big,

bony Afghan, who was known in the north-west of India as the "Frontier Gandhi".

The speeches began. We listened for over four hours. I watched Gandhi, who appeared to be absorbed in his spinning. Finally, he himself spoke slowly in Hindustani. He agreed to take over the leadership of the Congress Party again, provided the Congress accepted his condition of non-violence. It was not, he added, a passive non-violence, but an active one. He paused, and after a moment went on to annouce *satyagraha*—civil disobedience —for certain selected members of the Congress Party, possibly hundreds, probably thousands. If we did not believe in war, he said, we must spread our belief in peace. We knew that under the Defence of India Rules, speeches against imperialist war would mean imprisonment.

"But," he smiled his amused, toothless grin, "we have all been in prison before."

Throughout the winter following the Congress meeting in Bombay we read from time to time in the newspapers of the arrests of our friends or heard about their arrests from other friends. The arrests were at that time a formality. The civil disobedience movement was significant, as it symbolized the protest the Indian people were making at the continued refusal of the British Government to allow them the capacity to fight totalitarianism with the will of the people in the fight. Often friends whom we had invited to dinner or to a party would call up to change the date to one in the more immediate future because "I expect to be arrested on the date we had arranged before. I have notified the police that I will be making an anti-war—or rather an anti-imperialistic speech—that evening, so I had better be packed and ready".

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I WONDER ABOUT AMERICA

A FEW days after the conference I met Kamala Beri for lunch. She was dressed in a cotton sari and wore flat-heeled sandals. She looked at my chiffon sari and silk brocade blouse speculatively, but said nothing.

I came to know her better that afternoon than I had ever thought it possible to know a relative stranger. She took me

through the slums and tenements of the bazaar sections of Bombay to a small day nursery which she had opened in the poorest mill section of the city. She had, she told me, pestered her wealthy friends for enough money to rent the top floor of a tenement building where working mothers could leave their children during the hours they had to spend in factories and mills. Her co-workers took turns supervising the activities of the children. As these children were not compelled to go to school, Kamala and her friends managed to accomplish something towards an elementary education for them at the nursery. They also supplied what medical attention and food they could.

I went with Kamala to the nursery, where she conducted a class for mothers in child care and training, and another class of mill-workers, among whom she was beginning a campaign for adult literacy. The women I saw appeared on the whole subdued and without a great deal of fight in them. They were tremendously grateful for what was given to them, but they seemed to have the feeling that these whims of the rich could never last long. They appeared, in a negative way, to realize their double fight: for emancipation, and for the right to bring about that emancipation themselves.

On the way home Kamala told me something about herself. Born and educated in America, she had lived with her mother's family until she was sixteen. Her mother was American and her father Indian, so the decision for her had been clearly defined. Should she turn her back on India or America? With which culture should she identify herself? I asked her why she had chosen India.

"If I told you that this was where the work has to be done," she answered, "I'd sound unbearably priggish. I suppose it was the excitement, really."

It seemed strange that someone should want to do honorary civic work as a career, when she had lived out of India for most of her life.

"I did have woolly ambitions about being a musician at one time, but a piano looks so silly in an Indian home," she said. "Do you mind if we stop at the school and collect my son and daughter? I wish we had time to show you over the school, it's quite new. Indian, of course, but run on a European kindergarten system."

"You're determined to have the genuine product, aren't you?"

"India is going to be in the hands of people like my children all too soon. They'll need to know the problem from the ground up, and not from hearsay."

Kamala and I went together to see Mrs. Naidu the day before she left Bombay. This time there was nobody else there, and we found Mrs. Naidu considerably more serious and kind.

"I wanted to talk to you at greater length," she said, "only there were so many people making a noise the other day. I wanted to ask you what you thought you were going to do here. Have you any plans? Do you know what you want to do? What you *can* do?"

Mother's words came easily to me—I wanted to contribute in whatever way I could to the life of the young people of India. I thought that the only way of being one of them was to participate in their activities instead of being an inactive observer.

"But you don't know what to contribute? Is that the trouble?"

"Yes, sort of. I'm sure there are a lot of things that Europe has to offer, but I don't know how to convey anything of my background to Indians."

I thought she was changing the subject when she said, "You must have changed a great deal in the last year and a half."

"Not particularly. Why?"

"Well, most of you young people come here feeling that India has to prove itself to you. You have already reached the slightly wiser stage of wondering if perhaps you don't have to prove yourself to India." She tilted her head and looked at Kamala and me. "I'm so thankful I'm not as young as you two. I think people like your mother and me had all the fun; you children will come in for the hard work."

Kamala said, "You mean you had the excitement of starting the movement, and now we have to set up the machinery to keep it going?"

"That's a nice simple way of looking at it. Actually all we've done is to strike the flint." She smiled. "We make such attractive sparks—I shall resent it bitterly if you feel that I'm too old for that to be a pun—but sparks by themselves are no use unless there is something for them to ignite." She saw my confusion. "Our people need organization, not our Party workers, but the people who must form the body of Indian Nationalism, the villagers. You see, they are democratically inclined by history and by their present actions. Sometimes in the princely States they have a hard time expressing it against a sort of feudal rule. But even the

remotest villages function on a skeleton democratic principle—the election by the people of local rulers and advisors. It's for them that an Indian democratic government would operate, and in the nature of that operation the smallest community must be a part of the government. *That's* the kind of organization we need, to lead these small units into a participation with the bigger unit —an Indian Nationalist government. The mechanical functions of democracy." She stopped apologetically. "That's political training for you. One gets into the appalling habit of making speeches on social occasions. Pretty soon you address even your husband like a public meeting."

I think it was after that visit that I first thought of going to America. Where could you learn about the mechanics of democracy better than in a democracy? If you were a part of the "mechanics", then surely you would be able to understand them and be able to apply them. If you could gain some insight into the motives of the people who live under that form of government and maintain it, then wouldn't you be a step forward in harnessing that democratic spirit where you found it in India to a similar form of government there? Perhaps this was what the West had to contribute to Indian life now—the mechanics of democracy. It sounded grandiose, but was it impossible that I might have something to give in that line? I had lived for many years in England, but the English democracy was apt to be distrusted in India. So I wondered about America.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE PETER EPISODE

I REACHED home that night to find that a second cousin of ours from the north of India had come to stay for one of those indefinite Indian vacations which start out to be a week-end and may well last six months. She was a plump, jolly girl with a very sweet singing voice, and she had come to Bombay for some music festival. She spoke English fluently, but not well, and always seemed completely at ease. Peter Pendle had come to dinner that night, and Premila and he and I went swimming after dinner, but Narayani was too shy to appear in a bathing-suit before a man.

Premila and I were pleased when Peter invited Narayani to a

dance. Mother was away for a few days, else, I suppose, she never would have dared to go. We thought we were only arguing down a rather charming timidity when we persuaded her to accept, but we could hardly have expected such unfortunate results.

The day that Mother returned, a friend of a distant relative came to call. I thought it was merely a casual gesture of friendship, until I noticed the trend the conversation was taking.

"Well, your niece was looking very beautiful at the dance the other night," the visitor remarked as part of the usual small talk. In India the exact relationship never matters; all members of the family are cousins or aunts and uncles. "How lucky she is to have such a fair skin naturally! It *is* natural, I suppose?"

"I do hope so!" Mother said, laughing.

"You can never tell with these modern girls. We were so glad to see that she was having such a good time with her English friend."

The tone was distinctly sour.

I was all for not telling Narayani that news of her activities was spreading, but Mother said that she thought Narayani should know, because Indian girls take a great deal of notice of what people say, and to Narayani it might be the signal to stop seeing Peter. But it wasn't. We told her as casually as we could that her presence with an Englishman at the dance had caused comment among some of her very conservative relatives, and Mother thought that that would be the end of it.

Narayani came to Premila and me for help. She wanted to go on seeing Peter, but she didn't want to be talked about. We didn't know quite what to tell her, but finally decided to join in the conspiracy to keep her meetings with Peter a secret from the family. All three of us would go out saying that there was a movie we wanted to see, then we would leave Narayani wherever Peter was expecting her, and pick her up on the way back from the movie. It all had to be done with apparent spontaneity, because she didn't want Peter to think she was so frightened of public opinion. On the way home we would tell Narayani about the movie in detail, so that she would be able to answer questions and make comments on it if necessary.

On Christmas Eve Peter came to call after dinner and asked to speak to Mother. He wanted her permission, as Narayani's guardian in Bombay, to propose to Narayani. Mother looked very grave when, later, she reported the conversation to us. Narayani said nothing.

Premila asked, "What did you tell him?"

"I told him that he had my permission to speak to Narayani, and that the decision remained with her."

"You're very angry, aren't you?" Narayani asked.

"Yes, I am. I don't like the idea of you three fixing up rendezvous behind my back. I'm sure I don't know why you young people can never believe that your elders act as far as possible in your interests. If you had listened to me, or at least acted honourably by letting me know what was going on, this situation would never have arisen."

"I don't see what's so bad about this situation," Premila said stubbornly. "If Narayani is in love with him, everything is fine."

"I had the impression," Mother said, "that Peter knows nothing about how conservative Narayani's family is. It seems to me that you deliberately arranged these secret meetings to deceive Peter as much as to deceive me. It has all put me in an embarrassing and false position. I have no idea what I can say to your family, Narayani; they had expected me to look after you."

Narayani began to say, "I'm very sorry——" when Premila interrupted:

"I don't understand what all the fuss is about! I don't see why the situation should be avoided. After all, if Narayani is in love——"

"Oh, nonsense!" Mother said very sharply. "I'm afraid I can't take all this silly romance seriously. Girls these days seem to think of nothing else. There are many more important things in your lives than being in love with some man. Of these things your family is by no means the least." She sounded very like my grandmother. "A child of seventeen like you, Narayani, can certainly fall in love again, and maybe several times more. If you had followed my advice, and what I am sure would have been your family's instructions, you would probably never have given this Englishman a second thought. I deliberately kept the whole business from your parents because I did not want to worry them. Now you must resolve your situation as best you can. If you marry him you will, of course, make your family miserable. For yourself, you know what kind of a life you would have to lead here or in England. Nowhere would your layer of society be prepared to accept completely a 'mixed marriage'. I don't know whether Peter realizes any of these problems. If not, you will have to tell him and I needn't explain to you that his feeling about the whole thing may well change after that. Men are apt to be conservative in social matters."

"If I don't marry him?" Narayani said softly.

"Then I suppose the misery will be all yours. Either way it's unpleasant."

"Would you tell my family, if I didn't?"

"Not if you don't want me to. I don't want to talk about it any more this evening."

Mother swept off into her room.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

Narayani looked as if she was going to cry. "I don't know."

On Christmas morning Narayani had vanished. We thought at first that she was sleeping late, but when she wasn't up by noon, Mother went to her room. She was afraid she might have been a little harsh the night before. About one o'clock, when we were getting really worried, she came in. She had been seeing Peter. She had called him on the telephone and asked him to meet her down by the sea, where they wouldn't be interrupted.

"I told him what you said last night, Dhan-*masi*, and I think it scared him. I don't believe he had ever thought about it before. He hated the thought of not being accepted in his own home, England."

Mother said in her old vague tone, "I never have understood why, however liberal they may appear, the British get so insular the moment they leave their little island."

"Did he ask you to marry him anyway?" Premila asked.

Narayani shook her head. "I think he was going to, but when I told him all about my family and everything, I think he changed his mind. He told me he was going into the army." She walked to the door and then turned. "I never wished you a Merry Christmas," she said, and then laughed because it sounded like a Bette Davis movie. She returned to her family a few days later.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AN UNEASY WINTER

OVER EVERYTHING in Bombay that winter there was a strange feeling of restlessness and impatience. There were riots in the bazaar sections of the city. In the parks silent, frightening crowds of people listened to Nationalist speakers. Students paraded in the streets, and held demonstrations on the playing-fields. Little

outbreaks of violence occurred all over the city. Every morning the newspapers carried stories about students beaten up by the British-paid police and injured in fights, about police raids on certain suspect areas of the poorer sections of the town.

Congress Party members were arrested every day. Often we would rush to see friends who were going to be imprisoned for anti-imperialist sympathies the next day. They would be taken away to internment camps where hundreds of other Indians were held without trial or sentence.

Kamala was at our house frequently, working with Mother, consulting her about civic plans and evacuation schemes for Bombay in case of attack from the sea, struggling with problems which Indian women, amateurs at that kind of work, felt themselves compelled to take over. She introduced me to one of the executives at the Bombay radio station, and I agreed to do a series of talks. The pleasant young Indians at the station were very conscious of the fact that they were Government employees, although many of them had strong Nationalist convictions and worked frantically to evade the censorship and use the system as a source of free comment and news. They succeeded only occasionally, but they kept trying because they felt that the only broadcasting system in the country should not be kept closely in Government hands, but should be a medium through which Indians could express themselves honestly.

I gave my talks in English. After the first one I received a letter from a school teacher saying that the words I used were too long for her students to understand, as they had had only two years of English. She felt that she was being progressive in trying to teach her pupils by letting them listen to English spoken on the radio. And besides, she confided, her voice sometimes became very tired. Would I please, in my next talk, speak more slowly and write more simply? Somewhat encouraged, I tried to meet the needs of what seemed to be my only audience, but I received no more letters from the school teacher or anyone else.

Occasionally after those talks I worked on other programmes, sometimes writing, sometimes acting as narrator, but the general political tension in Bombay was too strong for all of us. Everyone wanted to be a part of it in some way. When the programme director suggested that I do some children's scripts for them I refused because my interests, if not my abilities, were all in the direction of Mother's work and the activities of her political friends.

At home there seemed to be perpetual meeting in session of Mother's political friends, talking about personalities, about India's future, about freedom, about war. On one occasion Mother called me in to such a gathering to tell me that she would prefer to have me stay at home that evening, as there had been a fresh outbreak of rioting. Professor Radhakrishnan, India's most prominent contemporary philosopher, laughed at her. He was one of the family's good friends, and had visited us in South Africa, so he did not hesitate to contradict.

"It will be perfectly all right as long as she doesn't go down to the bazaars. These riots have certain rather interesting characteristics. They always occur near a Moslem mosque or a Hindu temple. These stories of Hindu-Moslem antagonism and disunity that feature so largely in the foreign newspapers these days—examine the facts behind them more closely. You will find two significant things: first, these riots never occur in the villages where Hindus and Moslems live next to each other in complete amity (and India is, after all, a country of villages), and second, the riots occur only in British India. . . . Well, what conclusion would *you* arrive at?"

Mother looked confused and said, "Well, darling, if you'll be extremely careful, I suppose it's all right."

She was unbelievably busy. The political situation, with our leaders going to jail, was desperate, and everyone, even those as remotely connected with it as Mother, felt an increase of personal responsibility. She told us that with more and more of our Indian women workers in prison, many problems would have to be settled by people who preferred to work on social rather than on political issues. The failure of crops in a district near Bombay absorbed all her attention for some time. From the report which she received, the conditions were appalling, and nobody seemed to be doing anything about relief work. The refugees from that area could not leave because they had not the means to travel, and somehow they had to be fed.

She left Bombay for five days to tour the district herself and see what the conditions were, so that when she returned to the city she would be able to make her appeals, collect money and speak from personal observation. She came back, in her own words, "sad and depressed at the suffering of human beings in our country. I don't believe that there is such criminal and unnecessary misery in any other civilized country."

For the next few weeks she pestered her friends, formed a

committee to collect money and provide food and shelter for the orphaned children and for the refugees. She and her committee went to see the British Governor of Bombay to find out whether any official action could be taken, "But I'm afraid we did not get much change out of him." So famine relief was organized entirely on individual endeavour, canteens were set up, and children who had lost their families were provided for. Since temporary relief was insufficient, further provisions were made for their care in later years. Housing, guardianship and education had to be arranged for ten years to come.

Mother toured the district again later, and this time took me with her. For the first time I saw her on the verge of tears when the villagers gave expression to their gratitude for the work of her committee. "It's so horribly pathetic," she said, "because we have done so little. Hundreds of people have died and hundreds more have had their lives, their families, their homes ruined, yet for the few we have saved we are treated like gods." Their garlands and flowers decorated our house for a week. The work was nothing like completed, but there was no more money, and the situation had been at least alleviated. Perhaps the peasants could hold out until the rains and the possibility of successful crops. Mother looked so worn out afterwards that I hated to think what might happen if, as we all feared, the President of the All-India Women's Conference were to be imprisoned and Mother had to take over the leadership.

Kamala called up one evening and asked if Premila and I could come to dinner the next night to meet a friend of hers who was passing through Bombay on her way home from Bangalore. She turned out to be a short, attractive girl who wore a great deal of jewellery. We had heard of her in England when she was at college there, although we had never met her. I know that she wrote, but I had never read any of her work, and I didn't even know what kind of writing hers was.

All through dinner she talked very excitedly about her work in the people's theatre in Bangalore.

"I'm glad," she said, "that we are becoming increasingly dispensable, because now I can go to jail without feeling that I am deserting the theatre."

"When are you going to jail?" I asked.

"I'm not sure yet. As you know, all the active civil disobedients have to receive permission before they can get themselves arrested.

This is only limited *satyagraha.* We still hope that the leaders can make this an effective enough protest to make the other unnecessary. It's just that I feel very strongly on this matter, and since I can well spare the time and am not dependent on a job for a living, I hope I shall be allowed to go."

Nalini seemed to be exactly what I would have liked to make myself. With an English training behind her, she was using the talents she had developed there—her organizing ability, her knowledge of the planning and working of a people's theatre—here in India with evident success.

She was so completely Indian. Her clothes, her hair-style, her lack of cosmetics, her brilliant jewellery, her talk, her plans, all were obviously accepted by her Indian friends as sincere and admirable. But then she equally obviously had to contribute a great deal of knowledge and experience of the kind that India wanted.

The next time we saw Nalini she had remembered my request to see some of her writing, which was about villages and mill-workers. I wondered how it felt to be able to write about India and the Indian people with such authority.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE ALLAHABAD FAMILY

THAT WINTER we saw a lot of our cousins who lived on the outskirts of Bombay in Matunga. Mother's sister Bishan, a tall imposing woman with white hair and heavy dark eyebrows, had come to live with her son who worked in the city. On our first visit to them she told us in detail all the family news we had missed during our years of residence outside India. It was a tragic and typical story of the break-up of an old family, its growing rootlessness as the various members scattered and became Westernized.

I remembered Mother's home in Allahabad as a big high-ceilinged house, with a wide courtyard behind it and the servants' quarters the other side of that. In the days when the whole family lived there we owned the orchards surrounding it, the gardens, the compound, the tennis-courts and the smaller Dower House a short distance from the main building. Mother's mother

I remembered only as a prematurely white-haired and very beautiful woman with a smooth pink-and-white complexion. She left all the work of the house to the servants except for the cooking, which she did herself until a few days before her death in a cholera epidemic. My grandfather was more clear. A thick, stiff moustache was his most distinctive feature. He used to smoke a hookah, and while the children in the house listened to the mysterious bubbling from the water in his long pipe he told us stories about his wonderful, imaginary adventures. He had nicknames for us all, for Premila and me and for Bishan's two girls, Suhashini and Rohini, and her son Mohan. I was Nanuji's "*Vasant peri*"—the yellow fairy—because my name, which means spring, also means the spring colour, yellow, for that is the time when the mustard-fields of Kashmir flower.

Whenever Father was travelling in or out of India, Mother and Premila and I would stay in Allahabad. Besides my grandparents and Bishan's family, there would be Mother's older sister on vacation from her husband's home in Gujerat, and sometimes Mother's tall jolly brothers, with their jokes and tricks and their keen interest in sports. The house always seemed crowded with family and visitors. We children made our own amusements by conducting fruit raids on the guava and mango orchards, dropping stones down the well in the courtyard, telling stories about the spirits that lived in the well and about the family ghost that shook the branches of the Neem tree in the compound. Occasionally, when we were very daring, we sneaked into my grandmother's shrine, and although all of us were too superstitious to enter with our shoes on, we told ourselves that some day we would. At night our beds were lined up in the courtyard and we would creep into our little tents of mosquito netting to talk in whispers while we watched the moon rise.

Mother's parents had died while we were in England, and Bishan, who was a widow, had been unable to maintain the old family home. Her children had to be educated, her brothers were working in other parts of India—for we were losing our money. First the fruit concession was rented, then the orchards and the Dower House. Eventually Bishan and her family had moved into the Dower House and rented the big house. Now she was considering selling the whole estate outright.

The evening we visited her she told us laughingly of the discomforts of living in cramped city quarters after the Allahabad house. Mohan, her son, came in from work at six-thirty and left

again at eight-thirty. He had a job in the Postal Department and was very busy because of the war. He was reluctant to talk about his work—it was nothing exciting, he said, just routine. He seemed to me tremendously changed from the gay and talkative person, intent on winning the tennis championship, whom I had known in Allahabad.

Mother asked him why he didn't change his job, since he disliked it so much.

Mohan laughed. "Good heavens, *Masiji*! You can't be serious. Where would I find another?"

"But there must be other jobs, a different life."

"For an Indian without a British education? For an Indian who can't pass the *British* examinations, judged by *British* standards?"

"Do you want to fight the British in India?" I asked.

"How can I fight? In this battle only the very rich and the very poor can fight. If I were to go to jail, what would happen to Mama? Where would I get a job when I was released?"

All the paying jobs, he explained, were in some way connected with the Government, and for them Indians had to pass oral or written examinations set up on British standards. Those Indians who could afford to get a foreign education could, of course, qualify, but there were very few as lucky as that. In industry? The unskilled labourers earned a few cents a day, and the skilled technicians, again, had for the most part to acquire their training abroad. There remained the few dull clerical jobs, or the uncertain and insecure careers of writers and artists who must at all times keep their political opinions out of their work.

Mohan sat on the floor in his shirt sleeves looking square, muscular and very discontented.

"And look at these silly clothes!" he said, but he was laughing now. "I want to wear my native dress—I'm not comfortable in this get-up—but the office orders are, only English clothes allowed."

I thought that Mohan had answered the questions Premila and I had formulated in Delhi about the "official" Indians.

Bishan created a diversion by asking Mother: "Did you know that your niece Shammie is expecting a child?"

Sham Kumari Nehru, the daughter of Mother's second cousin, had been the first of the family to marry a Mohammedan. The orthodox members had been profoundly shocked, had tried everything they knew to prevent the marriage, but had finally accepted it. Mother, however, had encouraged the match, feeling

that the old restrictions were breaking down fast but not fast enough, and that anything she could do to speed the disintegration of outworn conventions would be a service to the country. It delighted her that the marriage was a happy one and that the family did not cut Shammie and her husband, as they would have done in Mother's girlhood.

Before we left, Bishan caught sight of the milkman passing in the street, leaned out of the window and shouted to him. I had expected, naturally, to see a milkman's truck drawn by a horse, but, to my surprise, he had the cow with him, and was leading it from door to door as housewives came out with their silver and brass bowls to be filled. Premila and I watched fascinated while the man milked, then Bishan boiled the milk—one couldn't be too careful, she said, about milk bought on the street—before she gave it to us to drink with some home-made sweets. As we ate we talked about the old days, family parties and festivals and the spacious Indian life that was gone.

The next time Mohan had a free evening he came to call on us, and the conversation turned again to Allahabad. Someone mentioned the family who had lived next door to us. There were two daughters, and we had heard that they were both very beautiful.

I said to Mohan, "I always hoped that you would marry one of those girls. They seemed like the kind of people to fit in wonderfully with our family."

Mohan looked very embarrassed. "I couldn't marry one of them now! Our family—that is, the men in our family—can't make matches like that any longer. The girls, yes. Because we are still a Good Family. But I couldn't support one of those girls. Besides, I have no home to take her to. Neither my family nor hers would consider it." He seemed so positive, so fluent with the reasons, that I wondered if he had been in love with one of the girls and had not been able to obtain the family's consent. "As a matter of fact," he said rather defiantly, "I think I am going to be engaged quite soon."

"To whom?" Premila and I said simultaneously.

"A charming girl from the Punjab. Mother is arranging it."

"Do you know her?"

"Oh yes, I have met her a couple of times, and liked her very much. She is a wonderful musician. . . . I'm pretty sure her family will approve."

Mohan went off, looking trim and European in his working clothes. When he got home no doubt he would change into the Indian casual clothes he liked—a cotton loin-cloth and a long shirt, with open sandals for the feet. Like me, he had still to find a satisfactory compromise between two ways of life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GUESTS AT TAGORE'S SCHOOL

FROM TIME to time Mrs. Naidu's phrase "the mechanics of democracy" kept recurring to my mind. But it was a speech Mother gave before the American Women's Club in Bombay that made me think seriously of going to America. It was the first time she had spoken to a non-Indian group in India, and she was greatly impressed by the intelligent questions the women had asked her.

That night, rather warily, I broached the subject of college.

"Strangely enough," Mother said, "I was going to ask you two if you would like to visit Tagore's school, Shanti-Niketan, for a few days."

"For how long?" Premila inquired.

"As long as you like. I have the invitation here from Tagore. . . . He doesn't seem to specify."

"From Tagore?" I said, and tried not to appear surprised.

"Just as long as we aren't expected to carve salad-bowls or anything." Premila was being deliberately unimpressed.

"He is one of the great men of our country," Mother said sharply. "You should feel privileged."

So it was decided.

We travelled across India to the damp heat of Calcutta, and from there we took the slow train into the slightly drier heat of Shanti-Niketan. The country looked burnt and exhausted. Arrived at the station, we stood on the platform and wondered how to get up to the school.

"Hi!" yelled a young man leaning over the steering-wheel of an old open Ford.

Premila and I, like proper young ladies, looked straight ahead and ignored him.

Mother, with subdued amusement, said, "How nice, we've been met."

The young man did not move from the car. "Hop in," he invited. "You'll get sunstroke if you stand around in the sun."

We rattled up the mud road for several minutes without daring to say anything to the young man. The Ford looked dangerous enough even when his attention was entirely on his driving.

At last I ventured, "Are we nearly there?"

"This," he said, waving his hand in an expansive gesture, "is it."

Gazing at the landscape with interest and concentration, Mother and Premila and I saw only fields and a few trees and the burning reflection of the sun on the little irrigation canals. For no apparent reason the driver suddenly stopped the car.

"The whole thing," he said, "is part of Shanti-Niketan. I have to go on from here. So if you get out and walk down that little road you'll probably find someone."

At the end of the road he indicated we came upon a group of beautiful little pavilions with a bigger house on one side. The pavilions seemed to grow out of the earth. Their red sandstone was the same colour as the soil, and the white decorations and contrasts were picked out in the local fieldstone. From the veranda of the house several people came hurrying forward to meet us. We were given garlands of saffron marigolds in welcome, and one of Tagore's daughters-in-law waited in the shade with a tray of sweets.

"Guruji is resting," she told us, "but he wishes to welcome you personally this evening. I will show you to your house. You will probably want to wash away the dust of the road before the midday meal."

Everyone in Shanti-Niketan calls Tagore "Guruji". It means teacher—"*ji*" is the usual respectful ending.

We walked to one of the pavilions—which served as guest-houses—and saw inlaid in mosaic on the veranda floor the word "*Shanti*" in the Bengali script. Tagore's daughter-in-law looked at the word and smiled:

"Unless Anil's driving has changed very suddenly, 'peace' is probably the most welcome thing we can offer you."

She clapped her hands briskly, and an ayah appeared from behind the house, stared inquisitively at us, and vanished with orders to prepare water for us to bathe.

"We may expect you to join us in half an hour?"

Mother indicated that we would look forward to meeting the rest of the family.

After more than a year and a half in India I had still not

mastered the technique of taking an efficient bath in an Indian bathroom. Mother looked despairingly at the usual bucket of warm water and the small jug beside it in the stone-walled bathroom, and told me I had better bathe first, because I always took so long. The other things that had been so hard at first I had mastered—like keeping a sari on without seeming anxious the whole time, eating with my fingers, learning to grip the strapless Indian sandals with my toes. But somehow the business of bathing defeated me. First I must pour water out of the bucket onto myself, using the little jar as an assistant, soap myself without losing the soap down the drain, then pour more water over myself without getting my hair wet, and perform the whole operation without falling off a little wooden stool provided as protection from the slippery wet stones. It was more than I could manage.

About three-quarters of an hour later we arrived at Tagore's house to meet the others. His daughter-in-law looked surprised.

"Oh yes!" she said, remembering, and called for a servant. "See about the food," she ordered him.

For what seemed like ages we sat and talked and sipped fruit juice. Occasionally people would drift in, look around, smile or ask a question and disappear. We gossiped about mutual acquaintances, touched lightly on politics and asked questions. Nothing was said of Shanti-Niketan or the work that was being done there. It was treated like a guilty secret. Whenever the name was mentioned everybody looked embarrassed and smiled understandingly. Eventually our hostess explained.

"We have received so much unwelcome publicity that we are afraid."

In some mysterious way she suddenly knew that the meal was ready. We all rose and followed her into the dining-room. Here we sat on the floor on cool reed mats and ate off a slightly raised table which was appointed in the Indian style with flat silver *thalis* and matching bowls containing curries and *dal*—lentil purée. We were joined by a couple of other women, to whom we were not introduced.

The meal was long and elaborate. Course after course of curries, curds, pepper-water, rice and sweets was served, but no meat or fish. Our hostess helped herself to everything, but ate nothing; the other women, too, pushed most of the food aside. Apparently this entire meal had been prepared only for us, and the others were pretending to eat out of courtesy, so that we would not feel uncomfortable at having put them to so much trouble.

After "luncheon" everybody retired for the afternoon siesta. Mother and Premila, with their usual ease, fell asleep almost at once. I first explored the two rooms and veranda of our pavilion, and found a gay little fresco painted on one wall, a number of letters from C. F. Andrews to Tagore on a table, and a set of Tagore's books of poetry. I promised myself to go into those more thoroughly after I had looked round the compound. I didn't want to feel completely ignorant when we met Tagore in the evening.

I wandered into the small court behind the house and stared at the unfamiliar brown land dotted here and there with outcroppings of brilliant rocks. On the other side of the low stone wall a small boy was asleep in the shade of his cow. I walked down and began to climb over the burning hot stones. The boy sprang up and raced towards me, waving his stick and yelling. At once the ayah awoke, quickly got up from her mat in the corner of the veranda and called to me.

"Miss Sahib! *Undar ana ji*! Come inside! Come inside!"

Mother appeared, looking first frightened and then cross. How could I be so stupid? Surely I knew by now how treacherous the afternoon sun in India can be. I sat down inside feeling rather foolish, and began to read some of Tagore's lyrics about Bengal and the life of the villages.

Late in the afternoon, when the group of pavilions was streaked with shadows and the far hills looked purple and threatening, one of the students of Shanti-Niketan came into our veranda and called, "Dhan-*masi*! Am I disturbing you? You don't mind if I call you Dhan-*masi* at once and forget the formalities, do you?"

She was a short girl with a dark skin and shining hair which she wore in a long braid in the conventional Indian way. Her sari was of fine cotton with a border printed with the Congress colours—orange and white and green. She was barefoot, and wore *mehendi*, a henna preparation on her toe-nails. She spoke English in a light sing-song voice and with a distinct Madrasi accent.

"My dear child!" Mother said, recognizing her at once, although Premila and I had no idea who she could be. "How like your aunt you have grown! How is she? I haven't seen her for years. Is she still living in the south?"

Padmini sat beside Mother on the veranda steps. "News travels fast among friends," she said. "I heard from my aunt that you were planning to visit Guruji even before Anil spread the news among the students this morning. May I show you round the compound before it gets dark?"

Mother said, "I can think of nothing nicer. We have to see Tagore some time this evening. We can hardly take all this hospitality from him without even acknowledging it!"

"Oh, I know. I will see that you are back in time."

We followed Padmini's compact little figure along the beaten earth road to the centre of the "campus" of Shanti-Niketan. First she led us to the girls' dormitories to ask two of her friends to accompany us. They were very shy and quiet, smiled a great deal, and spoke only when we asked them questions. Opposite the girls' dormitories was the men's hostel. Both the buildings were long, low and dark red, with scalloped and decorated verandas. There were some rather casual gardens in between which the students tended when they felt like it.

As we came to a crossroad where the paths from the different college buildings meet, we saw one of the students engrossed in painting a mural on the inside wall of a small shrine.

"Is that his particular project?" I asked Padmini, and tried to sound intelligent.

"Oh no, that shrine has been there for a long time. It always did look rather shabby," she added meditatively.

"Ah, an assignment," I said, glad to be able to classify something at last.

"Goodness no!" Padmini sounded surprised and shocked. "He probably couldn't stand it any longer, that's all."

We passed several buildings, bungalows and more business-looking structures which Padmini dismissed with a gesture. "All part of the centre."

When we reached open fields again—they surround Shanti-Niketan—she plunged down a turning which led eventually into a very lovely, very green, walled garden. Here she immediately sat on a stone bench and patted the seat beside her, indicating that we should join her. Mother asked no questions, and seemed perfectly at ease, so we followed her cue and tried to look natural and uncurious.

"Now," said Mother, "won't you sing something for us?"—as though we had been leading up to this the whole afternoon.

It was obviously what the three girls expected, for Padmini said, "Both my friends study dancing here. They will illustrate the song I am about to deliver. As I remember, Dhan-*masi*, you do not speak Tamil. Am I correct?"

"I'm afraid you are. I could never master your guttural sounds. In fact, my husband and I have always had to speak

English at home because I could never learn his language, and he —I think out of pure cussedness—would never learn mine." She smiled to show that she did not mean it. "In any case, it has had, as you can see, a frightful effect on my children. They can speak nothing well. Even their English is appallingly colloquial and unliterary!"

"They have a correct if pronounced British accent," Padmini answered with formal politeness, but some disapproval. "However, since this is the situation, I will be glad to interpret the words for you. There is the deer in the forest and I speak to him . . . '*Swarna nira mulla, varna melun*' .. . . and I call to him to come to me . . . '*Mani va va, mani va va*' . . ."

"The deer is the Lord Shiva?" Mother asked.

"Perhaps the deer is Shiva," Padmini replied evasively. "I offer him all kinds of things to eat, I offer him presents, and I call him to come to me . . . '*Mani va va*'."

Her thin, sweet voice rose into the evening air in a strange, inconclusive melody. The tune soared shrilly and stopped abruptly and unsatisfactorily.

Padmini faced us unembarrassed: "Now I will explain the fundamental movements of the dance which accompanies this song. My friends place the thumb of the right hand against the third and fourth fingers of the same hand. The forefinger and little finger point skywards the while, like this." She demonstrated. "This is the symbol for the deer. With the other hand, in graceful movements of the wrist, they will indicate the timid shyness of the deer, thus." Again she demonstrated, swinging her whole body with the movements of her hands.

Night came rushing up the flat road from Calcutta. Padmini's voice mounted tensely while her friends with utter concentration and trance-like steps followed her music with the symbolic dance. They turned and changed again and again—three fading figures, the loose ends of their saris caught on the evening wind, and their braids whipping across their shoulders.

With characteristic suddenness they stopped.

"The peacocks!" Padmini called. "Watch the peacocks!"

Over the wall and across the garden, with ugly, heavy steps, came three startlingly brilliant birds. They rose to the top of the tower in the corner of the garden and vanished into the dark caves of shadow behind the balconies.

We turned to find a servant standing beside us. "Guruji will be pleased to welcome you now," he said.

As we left the garden I waved to Padmini and her friends.

"Thank you so much for taking such good care of us," I called.

"And for entertaining us so delightfully," Premila echoed my tone dutifully. "We will look forward to seeing you tomorrow. That will be convenient for you, won't it?"

"Perhaps . . . perhaps."

"But you'll still be here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then we must see you all again."

"Yes, perhaps. . . ."

Tagore was sitting on the veranda of his house. We came up to him from the back garden, passing the huge granite sculpture of his head which was made by the director of the art work of Shanti-Niketan. Tagore himself leaned back against the bolsters of the hard wooden *thakat*. His eyes were half closed and the noble face with its massive forehead and flowing white beard seemed serene. Without looking at us he spoke:

"You find me in a troubled mood. It is not my custom to be despondent—scepticism I leave to the young." He looked at Mother. "But people of my generation and people of yours—we have too much to blame ourselves for. We cannot face these next years with equanimity."

He and Mother began to discuss Indian politics and the recent events in the country. I had heard much of this kind of discussion since I had been in India, among people who took every injustice in their country personally.

"Shanti-Niketan," Tagore was saying, "our haven of peace. Twenty-five years ago it seemed to me that to establish this centre, to fill it with our Indian youth studying and creating Indian patterns and Indian arts, would be the limit of my ambition. In those days we still needed to assert our identity. I felt that to do it through our arts we would attain more than a self-definition. We would establish our inextricable connection with other peoples, other cultures, other struggles for freedom. In art there is universality."

Mother asked, "How is that purpose invalidated now?"

"Now," said Tagore, and he sounded very tired, "now we have made our point. Morally we are established. For each peak we climb we see a hundred new peaks as yet to be scaled. The horizons widen. We have been short-sighted, we have not trained our young people to be teachers as well as learners. How could

we have guessed that in twenty-five years our people would have moved so rapidly ahead? Today we need, as it were, miniature leaders to work in the villages of our country. Yes, we have made a small beginning—very small. Tomorrow my son will show you what we are doing." He turned suddenly to me. "Why don't you come here? My good friend, your uncle, tells me that you want to *understand* India." He emphasized the word with slight mockery.

"I—well, I thought perhaps——" I began.

But Tagore continued fiercely and with what seemed like rising irritation, "Our youth, too much of our youth goes to learn from the West. Were we not *their* tutors originally? What will you learn from them? Technology!" he growled scornfully. "Look in your own villages, child. What use has an Indian farmer for technology until he has learned to defend himself against exploitation? Yes, we must educate and be educated at one and the same time."

He moved restlessly. The white muslin drapery of his *dhoti* looked shadowed and sculptured. In the fading light his face seemed harder and bigger than life, almost prophetic.

"Well, well. I talk and talk, but in the end we must depend on you."

A man came out of the house. He was wearing the Nationalist "uniform"—the loin-cloth, shirt and Gandhi cap all made from *khadi* cloth. He bowed and touched Tagore's feet, as, I learned, all the people in Shanti-Niketan do.

"Guruji," he said, "should you not be coming in?"

"This is my son," Tagore said to us. "He and his wife take almost too good care of me." He turned to his son. "I was just trying to persuade these ladies to stay with us at Shanti-Niketan."

"How delightful that would be," his son answered formally.

"Tomorrow you must show them our compound and take them down to the Santal villages and continue my pleasant task of persuasion and propaganda." He smiled at us. "My son is the editor of our magazine, the *Visva-Bharati*, to which you must subscribe. You see how shameless I am in mercenary matters? He is also assisting in the editing of the correspondence between my friend C. F. Andrews—of whose death you may have read—and myself."

"Oh, I found some of those letters in our guest house," I broke in. "You'd better collect them before something happens to them."

"Yes," said Tagore's son, "I was working there the other afternoon. What would happen to them?"

"Well, they might get lost, or–

"Who would take them?" he said, dismissing the matter.

Tagore got up and smiled at Mother. "How I would have resented, in the old days, having to leave my friends to rest."

He walked erect but slowly into the house, his son followed with little steps, anxiously.

A servant appeared and asked us if we would join "Mem-sahib" for dinner. As we followed him round the corner of the house Premila said with respect in her voice, "Saint Peter must look like that."

There was silence for a minute, and then Mother replied, "He used to be known as quite a *roué* when he was young. I remember my grandmother warning me even though he was old enough to be my father at the time."

At about six the next morning there was a triumphant honking outside the pavilion. A voice yelled, "Before it gets hot we must leave. Come!"

We kept Anil waiting a few minutes while we persuaded Premila that it really was daylight out, and not just someone shining a torch in her eyes. She was still muttering when she arrived, looking sleek and damp, on the veranda steps. Tagore's son and Mother were already in the car. Premila, with her usual presence of mind, leapt into the back with them, and I was left to sit with eyes closed and muscles tensed in the front seat with Anil.

First we drove to the buildings where the classes were held. These turned out to be the cluster of halls and houses which Padmini had passed with a slight wave of her hand the day before. Architecturally they were unusual because they had grown by an accretion of wings as the number of students increased and the institution grew wealthier through the years. Inside, the rooms were furnished entirely in the Indian style. The students sat on the floor, and used low wooden tables as desks.

The art block had been decorated completely by the students. One gallery, running the length of the building, was covered with murals illustrating the founding and growth of Shanti-Niketan. All the equipment that was used there, we were told, was made in India—as far as possible in Shanti-Niketan itself—by the students. They had, for instance, ground their own colours for the frescoes, after studying the composition of the paints used on the walls of the famous Indian caves which have been preserved for several hundreds of years.

We listened for a while to a few classes, but not many of them were being held in the halls. In the cool of early mornings, as the students felt like it, they met in the gardens or fields.

"Our purpose, as formulated by Guruji," Tagore's son told us, "is to encourage our students to as free a use of their medium and equipment as possible, to adapt and change the old Indian forms and concepts of art. It is from this nucleus of our youth that we expect the Indian artistic renaissance. They must, therefore, be more than masters of a mere technique, they must see the possibilities for development in that technique." He paused and looked thoughtfully at the group of pupils working in the shade. "Guruji has been accused of borrowing from the West in his work. Artistic conservatism prompts such a remark, and this is something we are trying to break down. Imitation we deplore. But the kind of borrowing that leads to a richer, integrated art—that we encourage."

Later that morning we drove down to the Santal villages on the outskirts of the Shanti-Niketan estate. The Santal villagers had been perhaps the most backward and economically underprivileged clans in Bengal when Tagore started his school there. Recently special students at the school have undertaken an extensive programme of social adjustment among the villagers. We were shown the kindergarten schools that have been opened for the children who are too young to work in the fields, and the secondary schools which specialize in agricultural and craft training. We watched little girls grinding the earth colours which the art classes of Shanti-Niketan used. One small boy was looking especially important behind some apparatus in which he was distilling vegetable dyes for the weaving industry of the village.

The boys and girls who had graduated from the Santal school had organized a village newspaper which they put out entirely by themselves—they made the paper and the printing ink, worked the presses themselves, sent their own reporters to cover local news and distributed the paper among the villagers. For the Santals the paper was free, but it had proved to be such an efficient little operation that many outsiders from the district subscribed to the paper, and they had to pay for it.

As we were leaving, one of the elders of the village came up to us and told us that some of the girls would be happy to dance for us if we wished. Apparently he had not yet asked the girls themselves, for they seemed very coy. They drew their *pullas*—the loose ends of their saris—across their faces and gathered in

embarrassed, giggling groups. At last one of the bolder ones came forward and began a rhythmic and simple dance. Encouraged, another member of the group started to accompany her by singing. Soon all the girls were whirling faster and faster in the simple tribal dance. They lost all consciousness of their audience. Their voices rose until they sounded almost hysterical.

Before the dance was over, our party, led by Tagore's son, left and walked away from the village. Nobody seemed to think it rude or to mind in any way. The elder who had been responsible for the entertainment did not even seem surprised. He nodded and smiled and went on clapping in time to the dancing. As we reached the car a precise academic voice was speaking beside us: "We have encouraged them to keep their traditional forms of dancing and art, but to see in them the possibilities of development and growth. . . ."

Padmini was waiting for us when we returned to the school.

"I have arranged," she said, "that you have your midday meal with me in the students' hall. Does this please you?"

We said that we would like nothing better, and followed her into the long dining-room. Here we sat on the floor with Padmini and her friends and ate off the low tables. The food was served by the students; each portion was brought in on a big palmyra leaf. The rice was in a little pile on one side and the vegetable curry on the other. Small earthenware bowls were brought round containing *dal*, pepper-water, curds and pickles. Before we began the meal one of the students came with a brass urn and poured a spoonful of *ghee*—clarified butter—over the rice.

As usual, we ate with our fingers, and when we had finished piled the earthenware bowls onto the leaf and carried the whole lot into the yard behind the kitchen. Here everything used in serving the meal—except, of course, the brass vessel in which the various dishes are cooked—is thrown away. No dish-washing, no time wasted—it seemed like an immensely practical system. As we left we saw the cooks and some of the kitchen servants cleaning the cooking utensils with earth and a small wad of grass.

We spent the afternoon at Tagore's house looking at the "art treasures" with which the rooms are filled. Exquisite pieces of Indian sculpture—some several hundred and even a thousand years old, taken from destroyed Hindu temples in the south of India, and some more modern, executed in Shanti-Niketan or by contemporary artists—are carefully balanced against Chinese

vases and paintings. Scattered through the house are Tagore's own paintings, startling and anachronistic. There is at least one in every room we saw, and one gallery was decorated entirely with them. Their harsh colouring and sharp lines contrasted unpleasantly with the gracious, even luxurious Indian furnishings, the low, carved tables of glowing wood, the brassware and the lacquer in off colours.

Premila caught my eye to find out whether I was as confused by the paintings as she was, and announced politely that she had not known Tagore painted as well as wrote.

We were told solemnly, "They express a side of Guruji's character that his many literary followers know nothing of."

This, at least, was obvious. The pictures seemed to me to show an almost savage bitterness. There was no discernible technique —most of the paintings seemed to be non-objective. Some were just splashes of paint on a canvas labelled "The bird of war devouring civilization" or "The spirit in philosophic meditation"—or something of the sort. All were beautifully framed and arranged with great care. There could have been no more surprising comment on the man who wrote the lyrical *Gitanjali.*

When we left the house to change for dinner Premila made her only comment on Shanti-Niketan. She had seemed, during all our sight-seeing, to be gently and absently bored.

"You know, this place may well commit suicide," she said.

"Tagore's son," Mother replied, "seems to have the right idea —if he can work it out. This 'development and change policy' will save Shanti-Niketan, if they really mean to carry it through."

"I'm afraid, though, that Tagore is too much the heart of the place. The Santals, for instance, would never kiss the ground his son walks on."

After dinner that evening the students gave an informal entertainment of music and dancing. We all crowded into the main assembly hall, and sat on the hard wooden benches and gazed at the bare, brightly lit stage.

After the dancing and some instrumental music, one of the girls came onto the stage and began to sing Tagore's famous hymn for the freedom of India. Her face was flushed and her voice was shrill with excitement. Like so many of her fellow-students, she believed fervently in the injustice of British rule in India and worked for Indian independence.

Suddenly Tagore rose to his feet from his place in the front row of the audience and stopped the singer.

"Rest yourself," he said, "your mood is against you. This is not a battle song which you are singing; it is a prayer."

In his thin, careful voice, which was still perfectly able to hold the tune, Tagore sang the verse for the girl. He sounded, in contrast to her hard, fresh voice, incredibly old.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

. . . TO COLLEGE IN AMERICA

UPON OUR return to Bombay from Shanti-Niketan in early March, 1941, Premila found a letter from some people she had known in England, Alexander Shaw and his wife. They had been sent out to India to establish a documentary film unit with its headquarters in Bombay. Alex wanted Premila to work with him in organizing the unit.

From what we could learn, the project was the result of a plan outlined by the Ministry of Information in England to make short movies about India for circulation in foreign countries. The whole unit came in for a certain amount of suspicion and criticism because it was a semi-official organ and no one could predict its politics. It might, of course, remain neutral. Premila decided, however, to leave her job with *Art and Culture*, and go to work for Alex, partly because he and his wife were such enchanting people, and partly because she felt that, regardless of what stand the film unit might take politically, it would at least train Indians in the techniques of documentary movie making. There was none being made in India at that time, and the possibilities for useful work were tremendous. Once we had a nucleus of competent Indian workers we could train greater numbers ourselves and eventually put the business of documentary movies to the use of our own country. In a population so extensively illiterate, visual education was the most effective means of disseminating ideas.

When Premila actually met Alex and his wife for the first time in Bombay she felt, she told me, like a complete stranger. Differences of nationality, costume, ways of living and recent experience had changed them from the people they had been in England. Alex was still too close to the bombing of London to be able to maintain an impartial view of India's continued non-violence. Premila, on the other hand, saw our side of the picture too closely

to be able to explain it to Alex. As he stayed in India longer he did understand our arguments and attitudes, but we would never again, unless we returned to England, understand their side entirely.

In taking this job, Premila had to get to know the Shaws again on a different and less satisfactory basis, as an Indian making friends with a foreigner. It was the kind of job for which she was suited, and she settled into it readily. What little confusion there had been in her mind about the kind of life she wanted to live in Bombay seemed to be resolved. She enjoyed her work, her friends and her leisure activities. Her life seemed to be just what she would have chosen if it had been entirely up to her.

Then, somewhat unexpectedly, my father returned from Africa. He looked very tired, and admitted that he wanted nothing so much as a long vacation. But before he could give serious thought to it he had to visit his parents, see his friends, brush the South African problems off his mind and become re-acquainted with India.

One evening about a fortnight after his arrival he came down to watch me swim, and we sat on the seawall afterwards. Where, he asked, would I like to go for a vacation—Kashmir again? Udaipur? His family home in South India? Ceylon perhaps?

"One day," he said casually, "we will go to America together, after this war . . ."

I think it was at that moment that the idea of going to America crystallized in my mind as a feasible thing. But I didn't want to say anything to the family until I had found out whether the trip was possible in war-time. I set out to make what inquiries I could by myself. It says a great deal for Father's patience that even after I met him by accident once at the American consulate, where he was visiting some friends, he asked for no explanations.

Eventually, I called a solemn conference of my family to announce to them my decision. It didn't work out at all as I planned. Premila was dressing for a dance, and kept darting in and out of the living-room with hair-pins in her mouth and a worried and questioning look on her face—not from any particular interest in my decision, which she thought was a passing whim, but because she had, as usual, allowed too little time for her dressing. Mother looked indulgent, but completely unconvinced. Only Father took me seriously.

I told them that I wanted to go to college in America.

"I suppose there *are* colleges in America," said Premila.

Father asked me what was wrong with the colleges in India. The answer seemed obvious, at least to me. Since I could not return to England, I saw no reason for going through an imitation of an English education in India. British colleges in India seemed to me hopelessly out of place, and valueless for an Indian who expects to work in an India not governed by the British. The Indian colleges do not, unfortunately, reach the standard of American colleges. In fact, they offer very little beyond the training I had already received in St. Paul's. I did not want to say anything about learning "the mechanics of democracy" in a real democracy, but secretly I considered that my chief reason for going to America. I felt that I had seen enough of Indian life to know I wanted to live in India eventually. I had made friends there that I wanted to come back to. I hoped to contribute my Western training and backgrounds, and a specific knowledge of democratic workings, to the life of whatever Indian community I lived in. But I knew that if I really settled down in India now, I would not leave the country perhaps for years; then, later, I would not have the excuse of college to take me away. This seemed the ideal moment to leave India, when my purpose and intentions were clear.

Father made up his mind instantly. "Those seem like sensible reasons," he said. "I'll help you in any way I can."

Once the issue had been settled in the family, Mother was calm and helpful, though I knew she worried a great deal. While Father and I spent days waiting in consulates and Government departments, writing for permissions from passport and immigration authorities, Mother inquired from her American friends about colleges which might be suitable. She was firm about two things: the college should not be co-educational, and it should be in what she called "healthful surroundings". One of her friends gave her a list of the better-known girls' schools, which included Radcliffe, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Smith and Wellesley. We spent an evening studying it, wondering on what possible basis we could decide. Premila suggested that we toss a coin, but Mother told her coldly that she had not the scientific approach.

"No daughter of mine," said Mother decisively, "will go to any college called *Smith*. I cannot pronounce Bryn Mawr, and I doubt if any of my friends can. I refuse to be prohibited from talking about you because I can't say the name of your college. As for Vassar, Caroline tells me that it has a reputation for country life, so that is out of the question."

"As I remember," Premila put in, "Anne of Green Gables went to Radcliffe."

"Then I consider Wellesley as chosen," Mother said, and tore up Caroline's list.

After those dream-like and hysterical weeks, the next two months of waiting were particularly trying. In the interval I saw Mrs. Naidu once before she was sent to jail.

"I hear you are planning to go to America," she said.

"Well, yes, if it works out."

"I don't know that I approve," she announced decidedly; "as a nation they are perpetually grabbing other people's talent." I hesitated before I could accept her remark as a compliment. "So see that you come back," she went on. "The youth of the world is rapidly going off the gold-standard." She smiled and added, "India is notoriously the only country that still hoards gold."

The Wellesley catalogue arrived, and Mother said happily that she knew she had made a wise decision—look at the countryside and the lake; it could scarcely be more healthful.

Premila was looking at the Bryn Mawr catalogue with a puzzled frown.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Did we make the wrong choice?"

"No. This is about an American festival of lights—I think."

"Divali!" Mother said happily.

"No, just in one college. It seems the students line up in a court and give lanterns to each other."

"Really?" Mother was interested. "Why?"

"I can't quite make out. Something Greek, I think. They all sing a hymn to Pallas Athena."

Mother relaxed. "That sounds a little too classical for you, darling. I'm glad we decided on Wellesley."

At last I received my permits to leave India and my visas to enter other countries. Suddenly the time for departure seemed terribly close.

Father decided to accompany me as far as Singapore. This would be the vacation he had promised himself, and besides he hoped to see Tagore in Calcutta. The poet was critically ill, and his doctors were not optimistic. Even when we had seen him he had been a very old and tired man; these were the last months of his life.

I was so superstitiously afraid that something would happen to

my visa that I left all my packing and arrangements until two days before I left Bombay. A few saris went into a light bag. Mother gave me some of her jewellery, and her sister gave me a ring to wear for good luck. Then Mother took me down to the gold and silver bazaar of Bombay to buy some heavy "servant" jewellery which I could wear as costume jewellery in America.

"I don't want you buying imitation gold, silver and stones over there," she said. "Indians wear only real jewellery, so if you feel you must be like the other girls once you get there, you can wear servant jewellery."

In the gold and silver bazaars you can buy heavy jewellery by weight. You choose the things you want, the shopkeeper weighs them, shows you the current list price for gold or silver, adds a few annas to the price for the workmanship, and then hands you your package wrapped in newspaper.

There seemed no time left for all the errands I had to do, the people I wanted to see, the friends I should say good-bye to. I was secretly very glad that Father was going with me on the first stage of the journey, because the thought of travelling alone to a strange country was becoming daily more terrifying.

The day before I left Bombay I drove out to Colaba to say good-bye to my grandmother and grandfather. All at once, they seemed very old. In my mind I had already started on my journey, and my grandmother had accepted the fact that I would never now become a model granddaughter. The house seemed emptier and dark. The pre-monsoon heat had sent the lizards into the rooms; they clustered motionless on the walls near the ceiling. My grandmother had decorated a small image for my protection; she made me wear garlands of marigolds and silver tinsel and gave me a handful of chilis to take with me. She looked at me for a long time and told me not to expect an easier task when I returned from America.

My grandfather came out of an inner room leaning on a stick. His face was haggard. He shook hands with me slowly and graciously and warned me solemnly about the gangsters in America. "I have read about them and seen them, too, in the motion pictures."

The servants were lined up on the veranda, still smiling and curious—"Salaam Miss Sahib, salaam *ji*."

I drove away from the house feeling sad.

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